

## REVIEW

# Teaching and learning in the content of International Mobility: An overview of the existing evidence

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**Abstract:** Universities and educational organizations aim to bring an innovative approach to internationalization in higher education in the digital environment. They focus on enhancing and cultivating the students' communication and intercultural competencies and building self-confidence in an international environment. This study presents an overview of the existing educative strategies and innovative interventions used for integrating/developing International Mobility (IM hereafter) competencies in higher education. For this purpose, we searched various databases following the MOOSE Guidelines for Meta-Analyses and Systematic Reviews of Observational Studies in the last five years. Our findings reveal the literature gap regarding teaching and learning in the content of International Mobility and extend the possibilities for future research directions.

**Keywords:** teaching and learning, International Mobility, universities, educational organizations

## 1 Introduction

Universities and educational organizations aim to bring an innovative approach to internationalization in higher education in the digital environment. They focus on students' competencies in communication, intercultural competencies and the building of self-confidence in an international environment (Bohman & Borglin, 2014; Asli *et al.*, 2017). This usually takes place in the small scope of one week of interactive lectures and workshops on digital and non-digital platforms to enable participants to take the first step towards their international careers (Kikilias *et al.*, 2009; Mikhaylov, 2014; Stoltenberg *et al.*, 2017). There is another critical beneficiary group, educators, who will profit from workshops to improve their competencies in digital teaching, acquire methodology for this specific way of teaching and will broaden their knowledge due to sharing their best practices with colleagues from different countries (Çiftçi & Karaman, 2018; Withers *et al.*, 2019). Lastly, working in a digital environment allows students and teachers from countries that would otherwise be excluded due to prohibitively high costs of travelling to the venue (Jacobs *et al.*, 2014; Schartner, 2016). For instance, in the Western Balkans, these costs pose an essential barrier for students and young academics to participate in academic courses (Klemenčič & Zgaga, 2014), thus hindering the development of these individuals and their intellectual capacity in the region (Kalogiannakis & Papadakis, 2007). Universities create communities and encourage life-long learning in society. Events, like weeks of international teaching, may also promote this aspect of life-long learning with international dimensions (Potts, 2015).

Furthermore, COVID-19 has brought many challenges to universities, and the university environment should move forward quickly to cope with the situation and become a leader in this field and fulfil its social role (Karakose *et al.*, 2021). The digital environment does not allow traditional teaching, requiring new approaches and more interactivity (Kalogiannakis & Papadakis, 2008; Scherer *et al.*, 2015). All participating institutions and their partners have been discussing the challenges of this new era they must cope with. Thus they want to equip teachers with proper methodology and tools to make their online and partly online lectures vivid and enjoyable to maximize their teaching potential (Claro *et al.*, 2018). Digital

competencies are crucial in the current situation where face-to-face teaching diminished due to COVID-19 (Karakose *et al.*, 2022; Konstantopoulou *et al.*, 2022; Trubavina *et al.*, 2021). These competencies must also open the way for teachers to international mobility (Çiftçi & Karaman, 2018). The same is valid for the students as they lack the competencies or have inadequate digital competencies to cooperate in an international academic environment (Kalogiannakis *et al.*, 2009; Monnot *et al.*, 2014). International relations offices of all universities aim to promote internationalization and mobility, and this study wants to show that even short-time events can significantly influence the participants' competencies (Katsaris & Vidakis, 2021).

The primary aim of this review was to achieve a general picture of teaching and learning during the IM across Europe. The specific objectives included: a. to summarize the methodologies for teaching and learning in this content, focusing on digital methods and teaching strategies to serve as a helpful guide to faculty in teaching and preparing students for a better acquisition of knowledge in international content; b. to gather, evaluate and synthesize the practical experiences on educative strategies and interventions for integrating competences in higher education for teachers and learners;

## 2 Methods

The systematic literature review sought relevant information on the existing educative strategies and interventions. It was driven by the specific review question: "What are the existing educative strategies and innovative interventions used for integrating/developing IM competencies in higher education for teachers and learners?"

We established a review protocol following standards outlined in the MOOSE Guidelines for Meta-Analyses and Systematic Reviews of Observational Studies. The search strategy was signed off by the WITEA-ID working group and was also advised by an expert librarian regarding its suitability and relevance of the search strategy. The search was concluded on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022. The review included research papers published in peer-reviewed journals over the last five years focused on educational interventions- innovations for integrating digital and IM competencies in teachers' and learners' education in higher education.

The WITEA-ID working group agreed on the following inclusion criteria based below:

- (1) Research papers published in peer-reviewed journals;
- (2) Papers published in English language and partner's native languages;
- (3) Papers published during the last five years as up-to-date knowledge is considered necessary;
- (4) Studies focused on educational interventions- innovations for integrating digital and IM competencies in higher education- in teachers' and learners' education;
- (5) Studies that evaluated the interventions/ innovations outcomes pre- and post- educational intervention irrespective of the presence of comparator groups;
- (6) Studies performed quantitative estimates of the effectiveness of the educational strategies interventions used.

Information for the interventions - educational strategies review composed of extensive searches made from online international scientific databases and national databases from each partner's country. The WITEA-ID working group agreed that CINAHL, Cochrane Library, ScienceDirect, SCOPUS, EBSCO, Pubmed, Web of Science, EMBASE, and PsycINFO were comprehensive enough for the electronic literature search.

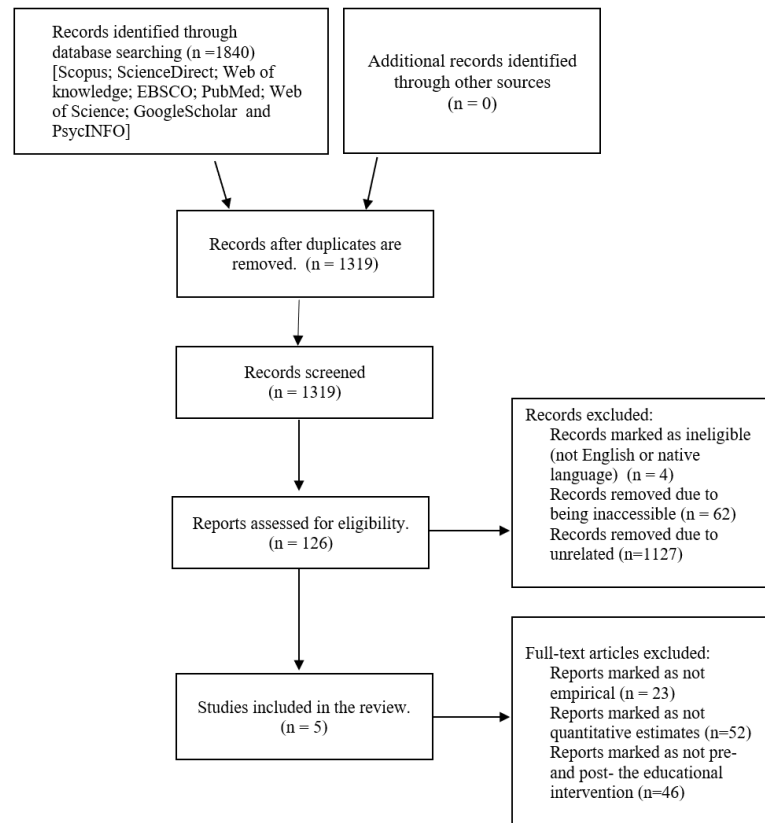
The WITEA-ID Working Group agreed on the search strategy (MeSH terms, search algorithm), data extraction and quality assessment process. Search terms were chosen from the USNLM Institutes of Health list of Medical Subject Headings (MeSH), and accessible text key terms were used. The agreed Search algorithm was: (("Higher Education" AND ("International Mobility" OR "Global Mobility" OR "International Students" OR "Staff Mobility" OR "Erasmus mobility")) AND ("Models, Educational" OR "Education" OR "Education, Distance" OR "Distance Learning" OR "Online Learning" OR "Online Education" OR "Teaching strategies" OR "Teaching interventions" OR "Teaching" OR "Curriculum" OR "Training" OR "Educative Innovations" OR "Educative strategies"))).

PRISMA Flow Diagram was used for data extraction, and applied filters included English and partner native languages, last five years of publication, research study design, and review articles. The agreed search and MeSH terms were entered into databases, and pre-filtered article numbers were recorded below. Filters, as indicated above, were applied, and total article numbers were recorded. All articles were exported into EndNote and/or Excel. Excel spreadsheets were used to apply the inclusion and exclusion marking criteria and as a record of agreement rates. Hard copies were scanned and recorded, and these papers were also included in the data extraction. Databases searches, records selection and data extraction, were performed independently by two experts indicated by partners.

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 An overview of the total studies included in the review

A total of 1,840 records were retrieved through our searches in Scopus; ScienceDirect; Web of knowledge; EBSCO; PubMed; Web of Science; GoogleScholar, and PsycINFO databases. After reading the retrieved records' titles and abstracts, 212 remained for further evaluation. Another 194 articles were excluded after reading the full article. **Figure 1** shows the exact sequence and process of study identification, selection and exclusion in each search step. Finally, five studies were considered appropriate for answering our primary research question.



**Figure 1** Scientific databases search (Moher *et al.*, (2009))

#### 3.2 Overview of the included studies

Diverse study settings, data collection methods, intervention strategies, and outcome measures were presented in the studies. Among five included studies, one was conducted in the US, 1 in China, 1 in Ireland, 1 in Australia, and 1 in Germany.

All except one study adopted a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to answer their questions. Participants were only students of different disciplines (nursing, business schools, etc.) at both undergraduate (3 studies) and postgraduate (2 studies) levels—none of the studies focused on teachers. Surveys and interviews (structured and unstructured) were the primary means of data collection. Educational means and strategies varied significantly and included specific activities, flipped learning and international mobility opportunity. Cultural intelligence, academic skills, a sense of belonging, the ability to understand and connect in the globalized world, independence and maturity, multicultural self-efficacy, metacognitive intercultural competence, and intergroup anxiety were the primary outcomes of interest.

The variety of the study design and outcome measures among the limited number of included studies did not allow the performance of a synthesis of the retrieved findings, although it still provided us with some certain conclusions.

#### 3.3 Key findings of the included studies

**Table 1** presents the main characteristics (primary author, year of publication, study characteristics, the aim of the study, measures, teaching-learning strategy, and main results) for each

study included in the review.

**Table 1** An overview of studies' characteristics, aims and findings

Author (year)	Study characteristics	Aim of the study	Measures/ intervention	Main findings
Kurpis et al. (2017)	US Mixed- methods 69 undergraduate students	To assess the effectiveness of cross-cultural experiential learning activity on developing students' cultural intelligence.	Cross-cultural Cultural Intelligence Development Activity is based on the CQ model, experiential learning theory, and contract theory. Traditional, cognitive-centred means (lecture, assigned readings, case discussions) Online post-activity survey	(1) Increased engagement of the learner at a deeper level; (2) Improved motivation, expanding the size of her intercultural knowledge base and, possibly; (3) Strengthening the humanistic component of business education by reducing ethnocentric attitudes and emphasizing the students' sense of relatedness to people from other cultures.
Irvine et al (2020)	Australia Mixed methods Quasi-experimental, non-randomized, pretest-posttest design Qualitative section 76 postgraduate students	To determine if teaching for self-regulated learning (SRL) improved students' self-regulatory strategy use in an accelerated nursing program and if there are differences between international and domestic students' motivational and learning strategy use.	Instructional support for SRL, including motivational and learning strategies adopted from Pintrich's theory and the MSLQ manual uploaded to the students' online learning platform combined with hard copies. Motivational Strategies for Learning Questionnaire and interviews (two open-ended questions to determine how useful the students found the instructional intervention).	(1) International students had statistically significantly lower task values and lower control of learning beliefs than domestic students; (2) All median values for motivational behaviours and learning strategies decreased for both groups post-intervention, except help-seeking, which increased for domestic students; (3) Students were highly motivated, valued the program, believed they could do well, and employed metacognitive strategies, such as elaboration, to retain information in long-term memory; (4) Students engaged closely with the task, organized appropriate information to construct connections, demonstrated the ability to apply previous knowledge to new situations, and made critical evaluations and modified behaviours to improve performance as they completed a task.
Zimmermann et al (2020)	Germany Mixed methods 3070 students	To measure the effect of international student mobility (ISM) on the development of multicultural effectiveness among three groups of students [control students with no mobility plans, present sojourners who participated in ISM during the study period, and a waiting group of future sojourners who participated in ISM in the semester].	ISM experience Questionnaires, interviews Multicultural self-efficacy Metacognitive intercultural competence Intergroup anxiety	Present sojourners and future sojourners showed: (1) substantially higher levels of multicultural self-efficacy; (2) substantially metacognitive intercultural competence; (3) the lower level of intergroup anxiety.
Walsh et al (2020)	Ireland Exploratory analysis 38 postgraduate students	To identify hidden patterns of student online behaviour in a flipped classroom environment about their command of the home language of the institution.	12-week knowledge management course Flipped-learning Log-file data recorded	(1) Flipped learning succeeded in engaging most students in the class and constituted inclusive support that can provide the flexibility that current students demand; (2) 2 clusters of non-native English-speakers were identified [group1 accessed the material more often than native students, and group 2 accessed the material less frequently than the native English-speaking students].

Briefly, Kurpis et al. (2017) conducted a mixed-methods study in the US. The study sample consisted of 69 undergraduate students from business schools. The teaching strategy was based on a cost-efficient, easy-to-implement experiential learning activity developed based on the cultural intelligence (CQ) model, experiential learning theory, and contract theory integrated into the traditional curricula. The intervention was delivered via traditional, cognitive-centred means (lecture, assigned readings, case discussions); as part of this activity, marketing students and advanced English as a Second Language students interviewed each other about consumer behaviour differences. The activity led to a perceived increase in cultural knowledge, motivation, and confidence in the students' ability to communicate with people from other cultures. Overall, students deemed the activity a valuable part of their education. Students' CQ was positively correlated with the self-reported (perceived) prior experience-based and studies-based intercultural competence. Compared with domestic students, international students scored higher only on the Cognitive dimension of CQ.

Tian et al. (2018) conducted a mixed-methods study in China among 118 international students. The study aimed to investigate students' experiences during their undergraduate study in an English-medium 5-year medical course at a Chinese university. Data were collected via annual interviews, complemented by two rounds of questionnaire surveys held at the beginning and end of the course. Based on self-determination theory, findings reveal the learning process through which the participants, responding to and interacting with new academic and social environments, gradually achieved adaptation and personal growth. The research concluded that students' dissatisfaction arises mainly from three aspects of their university environments:

linguistic, pedagogical, and attitudinal.

Irvine *et al.* (2020) performed a mixed-methods study among 76 postgraduate studies in Australia. The study aimed to assess whether teaching for self-regulated learning (SRL) improved students' self-regulatory strategy use in an accelerated nursing program and if there are differences between international and domestic students' motivational and learning strategy use. For this purpose, a quasi-experimental design using the Motivational Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) was employed to assess students' motivational behaviours and learning strategies before and after participating in instructional activities over the first semester. Data from two open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis. Study findings indicated that student median scores were above average on motivational behaviours and learning strategies, slightly decreasing post-intervention. At post-intervention, international students had statistically significantly lower task values and lower control of learning beliefs than domestic students. All median values for motivational behaviours and learning strategies decreased for both groups post-intervention, except help-seeking, which increased for domestic students.

Zimmermann *et al.* (2020) studied the effect of international student mobility (ISM) to increase students' multicultural effectiveness and their (international) job market potential. The study took place in Germany among 3070 students at German higher education institutions who were assigned to three groups (i.e., control students with no mobility plans, present sojourners who participated in ISM during the study period, and a waiting group of future sojourners who participated in ISM in the semester sequencing the study period). The analyses with (moderated) latent change models showed substantially higher pre-departure multicultural effectiveness in the present and future sojourners compared with control students, as well as positive effects of ISM on the development of multicultural effectiveness. The most substantial effects were observed amongst students without previous international mobility experiences.

Walsh *et al.* (2020) delivered an exploratory observational study among 38 postgraduate business students. Researchers used log-file data to identify hidden patterns of student online behaviour in a flipped classroom environment concerning their command of the home language of the institution. A twelve-week knowledge management course was offered to 24 of whom were native Irish, two international students whose first language was English, and 12 students whose native language was other than English. Using the cluster analysis, different categories were identified regarding when and how often online flipped lessons were accessed: (1) before class, (2) after class and before a weekly exam, and (3) after the weekly exam but before an assignment. Findings indicated sustained access to flipped materials throughout the semester for all students. In addition to accessing online lessons prior to class, students also accessed online lessons prior to weekly exams and project submission deadlines, indicating the value of such material for revision. Interestingly, two clusters of non-native English-speakers were identified where one group accessed the material more often than native students, and the second group accessed the material less frequently than the native English-speaking students.

## 4 Discussion

Although the importance of learning and teaching in the content of IM has drawn significant scientific attention over the last years, very few studies were found to focus on interventional studies and their effectiveness (Aguayo *et al.*, 2022; Mohammed, 2022). Specifically, studies that use quantitative data or assess the impact of an educative education on students learning and IM competencies are scarce, and teachers are neglected. The present literature review attempted to identify the most recent publications in this fascinating area of research and education.

Even though the amount of papers is quite limited and small, some valuable insights can still be drawn from this review. Firstly, all studies utilized a different learning strategy during the teaching intervention. This depicts, along with difficulty in identifying similar studies, that teaching and learning in the content of IM is a very profound and newly researched subject with very little known about successful learning intervention. Consequently, it stands to reason that researchers utilize different learning strategies to understand the impact they can have.

Additionally, all studies reported encouraging and positive results in regard either to learning acquisition of competencies (Tian *et al.*, 2018; Irvine *et al.*, 2020; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2020), engagement (Kurpis *et al.*, 2017; Irvine *et al.*, 2020; Walsh *et al.* 2020), motivation (Kurpis *et al.*, 2017; Irvine *et al.*, 2020) or psychological factors (Tian *et al.*, 2018; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2020), such as a decrease in anxiety, increase self-awareness etc. These outcomes are essential moving forward as they clearly show the general potential of students learning in IM. However, it is also essential to identify the obstacles and aspects that hinder their learning in IM, such as linguistic, pedagogical, and attitudinal of their university environments (Tian *et al.*, 2018), and could cause negative results, i.e. decline in motivation in some aspects (Irvine *et al.*, 2020).

The variety of the study design and outcome measures among the limited number of included studies did not allow the performance of a concrete synthesis of the retrieved findings, although it still provided us with some conclusions and recommendations for future research and practice.

## 5 Limitations

There are several limitations and threats to the validity of our review. The minimal number of eligible articles for our study makes it difficult to arrive at conclusive results. However, this also indicates that more research is necessary to understand the effectiveness of different approaches in IM fully.

Additionally, our review is partially subjected to language bias since our research was not excluded English-written articles but the partners' native language. On the other hand, some papers were still excluded due to being written in another language.

Moreover, concerning publication bias, though we tried to follow some of [Kitchenham's \(2004\)](#) suggestions, such as including proceedings from conferences and being in communication with experts in the field, we are still subject to it since we excluded some types of publications, etc. dissertations, conceptual papers. Although it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of a learning strategy unless you utilize tests before and after the intervention, future researchers should further expand their investigation to include data regardless of study types, quantitative or qualitative, or measurement tools.

## 6 Conclusions

International student mobility is an increasingly vital educational means to enhance students' multicultural effectiveness and future professional potential. Besides the development of international education and mobility, there is a growing acceptance of the importance of developing intercultural competence ([Unesco, 2013](#); [Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017](#)). However, little is known about the use of proper learning strategies and their impact on students, as very few studies have focused on the learning of IM.

Drawn upon existing evidence, we present below some recommendations for future research and education in the area of IM:

- (1) Enhancement of training in intercultural communication (cultural awareness and competency and intercultural communication) for students and staff;
- (2) Enhancement of research in intercultural communication (cultural awareness and competency and intercultural communication). Indicative research areas of intercultural communication include the values of language training; cultural and global awareness; cultural "competence"; cross-cultural engagement in teams; language studies; sensitivity and willingness to engage with others in a cultural setting; intercultural differences; stereotypes; personal space; values and ethics; verbal versus nonverbal communication;
- (3) Consideration of cross-cultural instructional design when creating an online course and inclusion of the perspectives of international students and staff when establishing programs, building relationships, and improving experiences in higher-education classrooms;
- (4) Enhancement of research in the area of barriers and motivators for IM among students and staff to link barriers and motivations to show parallels and identify areas for further research and intervention;
- (5) Establishment of an institution agency that will allow students and staff to share their perspectives of practices and values in the university setting;
- (6) Enhancement of research on the design, development and implementation of effective interventions and strategies to enhance IM among students and staff;
- (7) Establishment of Contact with Peers (classmates or colleagues) while the international student and staff are still in their home country either through organizations alumni or through social media networks *etc.*

## 7 Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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