Core Competencies for International Mobility for Teachers and Students in Higher Education

Abstract

Introduction: Consensus on the international mobility (IM) competencies for students and teachers has not yet been achieved in the European context. We aimed to establish a set of core IM competencies essential for effective internationalization and mobility and make suggestions for their implementation among higher education institutions in European countries. **Methods:** A multi-phase modified Delphi survey was conducted: Phase 1, a literature review; Phase 2, a two-round consensus of experts; and Phase 3, a Delphi survey. **Results:** In Phase 1, 28 records were selected and after removing duplicates, the remaining competencies (n =40) were evaluated in a two-round expert consensus. In Phase 2 competencies scored between 84 (highest score) to 54 ("lowest score") and in Phase 3 all evaluated items were included in a final set of competencies (40 in total) as suggested with no further changes. **Conclusions:** The set of IM competencies can guide educators, academics, and stakeholders in the development of content that incorporates specific competencies and skills into educational programs. Prioritizing the IM competencies and learning outcomes that are most necessary and adapting them to every context will provide higher education institutions with guidelines for strengthening internationalisation and mobility among students and teachers.

Keywords: Teaching, Learning, International Mobility, Universities, Educational organizations, competency, consensus, Delphi survey

INTRODUCTION

Over the last years higher education institutions strive to gain international recognition, and thus reliability and visibility that make themselves more effective and competitive towards other European scientific institutions. Internationalization provides the opportunity to improve the quality of education and to increase the effectiveness of research and recognition of scientific achievements in Europe. As a result, universities organise and offer joint international research projects or joint study programmes, but above all promote the mobility of their students and teachers. For this reason, the enhancement of students' and teachers' competencies in communication, intercultural competencies and the building of self-confidence in an international environment consist of a priority (Bohman & Borglin, 2014).[1] Towards this direction, international relations offices of all universities aim to enhance the acquisition of essential international mobility competencies by organizing short-time events- workshops and to promote internationalization and mobility. This usually takes place in the form of short interactive lectures and/or workshops on digital and non-digital platforms to enable participants to take the first step towards their international careers (Stoltenberg et al., 2017).[2]

The aim was to define the competencies on IM for students and teachers in higher education in an international content. Towards this direction, we aimed to gather, evaluate and synthesize current evidence about the IM competencies developed in higher education for teachers and learners.

METHODS

Phase 1: A Literature Review on Competences

Phase 1 included a literature review which aimed to identify and analyze studies focusing on core competencies and the existing knowledge on IM competencies in higher education for both teachers and students. Research teams from the partner countries which consisted the WITEA-ID working group including Czech Republic, Greece, Croatia, and Luxembourg participated in the review. The WITEA-ID working group formulated the research question, defined the search strategy, performed the search and data extraction and analysis. The literature review sought to obtain relevant information on the existing evidence about the IM competencies in the two target groups and was driven by the specific review question: "What are the core IM competencies for

students and teachers in higher education?". Studies were identified using a search strategy and predefined criteria in the bibliographic databases ScienceDirect, Web of Science, SCOPUS, EBSCO, PubMed, Google Scholar, and PsycINFO, as well as in the national databases of all participating countries. The search strategy was signed off by WITEA-ID working group and was also advised by an expert librarian regarding the suitability and relevance of the search strategy. The search was concluded on 4th November 2021. The review included research papers published in peer- reviewed journals over the last 10 years that focused on IM competencies in teachers' and learners' education in higher education. Each database was searched by two researchers from the different countries. The data search filters that were applied included English and partner native languages, last 10 years of publication and research study design. Using content analysis,[3] two researchers (AP and VD) identified IM competencies for teachers and students. Subsequently, the set of competencies was revised (EP and AT), and duplicate and irrelevant items were excluded.

Phase 2: Two-Round Expert Consensus to Prioritize the Most Essential EBP Competencies

Following *Phase 1* the research team developed an initial set of items (teachers' and students' IM competences) to be evaluated by external reviewers based on content analysis. For this purpose, 3 to 5 experts from each partner's country were invited to score from 0 (totally inadequate) to 5 (totally adequate) the set of items indicating the degree of adequacy of the content of each item (**Table 1**). The experts were invited via email and received an invitation letter explaining the purpose of the invitation, and their role and were kindly asked to fill in the excel form and return it to the WITEA-ID working group. HMU team reviewed the proposals with the comments and added all the scores getting a final punctuation. Then the items in each step were sorted in descending order.

Phase 3: A Delphi Survey to Establish a Final Set of Core IM Competencies for Students and Teachers

A Delphi survey was conducted to determine consensus and clarity around the competencies (McPherson, Reese, & Wendler, 2018).[4] The participants were members of the WITEA-ID project consortium (1-2 member from each partner country) with experience in digital teaching and previous experience in international mobility exchange programs. The experts received an excel file with the initial set of competencies and were asked to participate in two meetings which aimed to establish a consensus on essential IM competencies for teachers and students and to agree on

the final set of IM competencies. Two rounds of Delphi technique were conducted with the experts discussing on the final version of the set of core IM competencies for teachers and students.

RESULTS

A total of 1,750 records were retrieved through our searches in Scopus; ScienceDirect; Web of knowledge; EBSCO; PubMed; Web of Science; Google Scholar and PsycINFO databases. Of these, 348 duplicates were excluded. Subsequently, 735 records were excluded by title, 425 records were excluded by abstract, and 214 were excluded by full-text screening. The basic set of documents to be analyzed comprised 28 records covering the period 2010 to 2021. Two members of the WITEA-ID working group (one of the HMU team and one of the MENDELU team) developed an initial set of teachers' and students' IM competencies based on review and content analysis. The initial list of competencies was then sent to partners for comments and feedback and the final list of ***Phase 1*** resulted to 40 items in total (**Table 2**). The results of external experts' scoring and list of competencies following prioritization (***Phase 2***) are presented in **Table 3** and **Figure 1**. Competencies scored between 84 (highest score- "Communication skills") to 54 ("lowest score- "Metacognition"). Competencies including "Inter-cultural skills, understanding, and sensitivity", "Teamwork and ability to work with others", "Cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity", "Social networking", "Social skills", "Flexibility/adaptability", "Inter-personal skills, competence, and connections", "Language competence", "Motivation", and "Tolerance" followed "Communication skills" with a score above or equal to 75. The two rounds of Delphi technique conducted by members of the WITEA-ID consortium led to the full acceptance of the 40 items list which was developed during ***Phase 2*** as the final set of core IM competencies with no changes (**Table 3**).

DISCUSSION- CONCLUSIONS

Based on the literature review and expert consensus, a set of core competencies for both students and teachers essential for a successful IM placement in European higher education institutions were identified. Institutions need to consider these competencies for future planning of educational programs in the field of IM. Higher education institutions should also promote the teaching of IM skills and competencies in order to prepare confident members of the academic community ready to act on issues of universal significance in today's interconnected world. IM competencies have to be cultivated in a spirit of globalization through focusing on the below main areas:[5]

- Enhancement of training in intercultural communication for students and staff.
- Enhancement of research in intercultural communication.
- 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.
- Enhancement of research in the area of barriers and motivators for IM among students and staff.
- Enhancement of research on the design, development and implementation of effective interventions and strategies to enhance IM among students and staff.
- Establishment contact with peers (classmates or colleagues) while the international student and staff is still in his or her home country.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Table 1. Experts' Characteristics

Country-Institution		Age	Sex	Affiliation	Experience (years)	Current role
Greece- UOC	Expert 1	53	F	Department of International Relations	20	Acting head, Erasmus International Mobility Inter-Institutional Agreements
	Expert 2	55	F	Assistant Professor-Department of Philology	25	Erasmus Departmental Coordinator
	Expert 3	55	M	Assistant Professor-Department of Sociology	25	Deputy Erasmus Coordinator
	Expert 4	54	F	Department of International & Public Relations	30	Acting Head, Erasmus International Mobility
Greece-HMU	Expert 1	41	F	Assistant Professor	7	Erasmus Departmental Coordinator, Department of Nursing
	Expert 2	42	F	Assistant Professor	10	Erasmus Departmental Coordinator
	Expert 3	45	M	Assistant Professor	15	Erasmus Departmental Coordinator
	Expert 4	45	M	Associate Professor	8	Erasmus Departmental Coordinator
Czech Republic-MENDELU	Expert 1	32	M	Assistant Professor	3	Assistant Professor - Department of Law and Social Sciences
	Expert 2	29	F	Adminsitrative staff	3	Administrative STAFF of international relations office.
	Expert 3	45	F	Adminsitrative staff	4	Erasmus Coordinator
	Expert 4	50	F	Assistant Professor	10	English teacher
	Expert 5	42	F	Assistant Professor	17	Faculty of regional Development and International Studies
Croatia- IUC	Expert 1	57	F	Administrative staff	32	Head of international relations office
	Expert 2	43	F	Administrative staff	17	Executive Secretary
	Expert 3	42	F	Administrative staff	14	Head of international relations office

Table 2. Initial list of IM competencies (in alphabetical order)

No	Competency
1.	Academic skills
2	Analytical skills
3.	Cognitive competence
4.	Communication skills
5.	Confidence
6.	Creativity
7.	Critical thinking and reflection
8.	Cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity
9.	Curiosity
10.	Decision-making
11.	Divergent thinking
12.	Educational knowledge
13.	Flexibility/adaptability
14.	Independent learning
15.	Initiative and enterprise
16.	Inter-cultural skills, understanding, and sensitivity
17.	Inter-personal skills, competence, and connections
18.	Intra-personal competence
19.	Language competence
20.	Leadership abilities
21.	Maturity and personal growth
22.	Metacognition
23.	Motivation
24.	Organizational skills
25.	Personal skills
26.	Problem-solving
27.	Professional skills
28.	Reflexivity
29.	Responsibility
30.	Sector competencies/skills
31.	Self-management
32.	Self-reflection
33.	Self-regulation
34.	Social networking
35.	Social skills
36.	Socialization skills
37.	Teamwork and ability to work with others
38.	Technical knowledge
39.	Tolerance
40.	Ability to pass on skills and qualities to others

Table 3. Prioritization of the competencies based on the experts' scoring

	IM competencies	SCORE
1.	Communication skills	**84**
2.	Inter-cultural skills, understanding, and sensitivity	**78**
3.	Teamwork and ability to work with others	**78**
4.	Cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity	**77**
5.	Social networking	**77**
6.	Social skills	**76**
7.	Flexibility/adaptability	**75**
8.	Inter-personal skills, competence, and connections	**75**
9.	Language competence	**75**
10.	Motivation	**75**
11.	Tolerance	**75**
12.	Responsibility	**74**
13.	Critical thinking and reflection	**73**
14.	Technical knowledge	**73**
15.	Intra-personal competence	**72**
16.	Problem-solving	**72**
17.	Self-management	**71**
18.	Socialization skills	**71**
19.	Ability to pass on skills and qualities to others	**70**
20.	Professional skills	**70**
21.	Educational knowledge	**69**
22.	Organizational skills	**69**
23.	Cognitive competence	**68**
24.	Confidence	**68**
25.	Personal skills	**68**
26.	Academic skills	**66**
27.	Self-regulation	**66**
28.	Creativity	**65**
29.	Decision-making	**65**

30.	Independent learning	**65**
31.	Sector competencies/skills	**65**
32.	Initiative and enterprise	**64**
33.	Reflexivity	**63**
34.	Self-reflection	**63**
35.	Analytical skills	**62**
36.	Curiosity	**62**
37.	Divergent thinking	**62**
38.	Maturity and personal growth	**60**
39.	Leadership abilities	**55**
40.	Metacognition	**54**
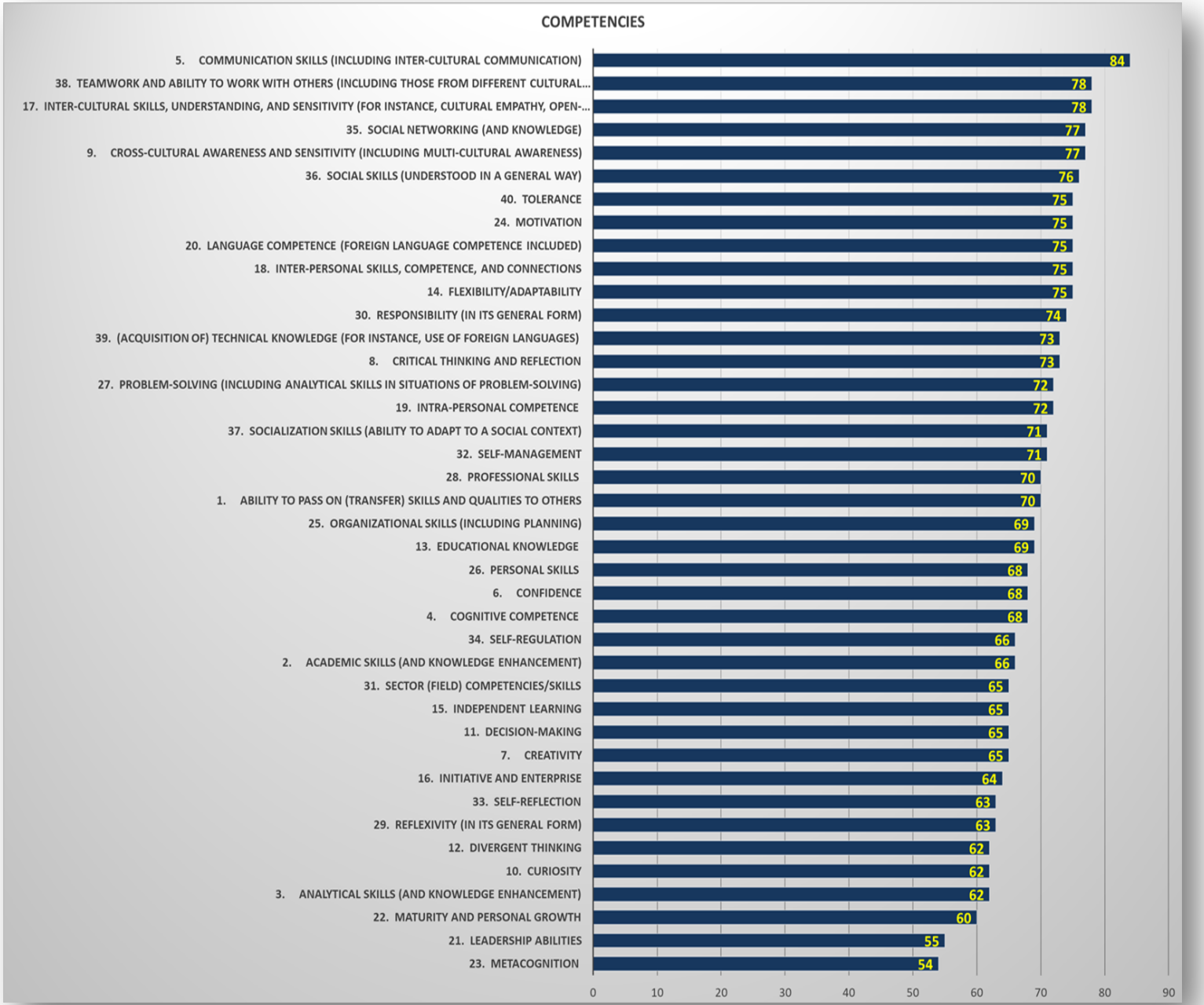
Diagram 1. Diagram of competencies after score prioritization