



LONGITUDINAL STUDY ON THE IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME KEY ACTION 1 MOBILITY PROJECTS FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION STAFF

REPORT IN BRIEF

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Vilnius, Lithuania

BACKGROUND

This is the annotated version of the second part of the longitudinal study on the ***Impact and sustainability of the Erasmus+ programme Key Action 1 mobility projects for school education staff*** as a part of School Education Transnational Cooperation Project (TCA). The project was performed by Erasmus+ National Agencies in four countries: Education Exchanges Support Foundation (EESF) (Lithuania), Archimedes Foundation (Estonia), Finnish National Agency for Education, Foundation for the Development of the Education System (Poland). The study is led by the Education Exchanges Support Foundation (EESF) (Lithuania) and is based on the work of national experts in the mentioned four countries.

The focus of the first part of the longitudinal study carried out in 2016 was the impact and sustainability of the Erasmus+ Programme Key Action 1 (KA1), Call 2014, right after the completion of the projects, while the second part (the follow-up research) performed in the year 2019 (two years after the end of the projects) focuses on the analysis of the long-term impact of teacher mobility on school.

THE AIM

The second part of the longitudinal study ***Impact and sustainability of the Erasmus+ Programme Key Action 1 (KA1) learning mobility of individuals, mobility projects for school education staff*** aims to identify the long-term impact of teacher mobility on the school as an organisation looking for the success factors of project result sustainability.

THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is the capacity of the project to continue and use its results beyond the end of the funding period (ERASMUS+ guide). It is expected that the project has a long-term impact on people, practices, organisations and systems after the end of the project, i.e. the project results have been continuously used and exploited in the longer-term. The project is considered sustainable if the outputs (or the relevant activities) are maintained, and/or enhanced in the long-term.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research is based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods: 1) secondary data analysis (EU project databases EplusLink and Mobility Tool+), N=1344; 2) follow-up survey with mobile staff, N=604; 3) interviews and focus groups with school leaders and mobile staff (eight focus groups, N=55); and 4) case study (focus groups with mobile staff, interviews with school principal, document analysis), - one case study in each country.

The long-term impact in this study is examined as the self-reported changes in teachers' professional behaviour and perception of organisational change (changes in teaching and learning, changes in school culture).

THE MAIN RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

LONG-TERM IMPACT OF THE ERASMUS+ KA1 STAFF MOBILITY ON TEACHERS’ PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

The results of the longitudinal study showed that the Erasmus+ KA1 staff mobility had a positive long-term impact on the professional life of the teachers. Two years after the completion of the Erasmus + KA1 project, the majority of the staff involved in the mobility appreciated the mobility as relevant to their professional success.

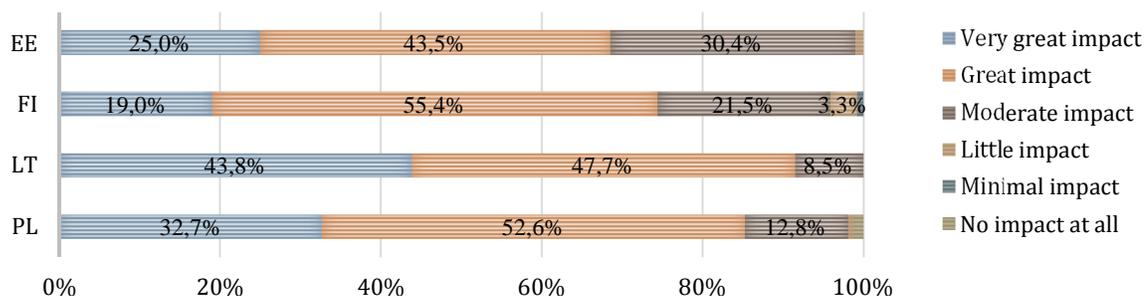


Figure 1. The overall impact of Erasmus + KA1 staff mobility on teachers’ personal professional success (perception of mobile teachers)

„This is the word that comes to my mind "break-through" or "exit from the safe area" and the opening of the horizons.“ (LT)

The most commonly mentioned area of the long-term impact of the mobility experience was the **attitude change** (openness to changes and innovations) which translated itself into the behavioural change – **innovative pedagogical practices** (more frequent application of ICT technologies, usage of new teaching methods). Teachers often reported that such an attitude change was transferred to the learners having a positive long-term impact on the communication and interaction between teachers and students, as well as the overall atmosphere at school.

“I also gained confidence for presenting myself and my work to others. This is important because I would not do this without my experience of learning mobility.” (EE)

The longitudinal study revealed that the **increase in teachers’ self-esteem** and self-confidence was another long-lasting change pointed out by the participants of the research. The positive change in teachers’ self-esteem and self-confidence often resulted from the development of foreign language competences and increased awareness about the education system in other countries. The higher self-esteem and self-confidence was highly determined by the acquired perspective of the appreciation of their personal, school’s or national educational system’s adequate professional mastery (the proof of meeting the required professional level) needed to ensure the excellent teaching quality. Finnish teachers’ self-esteem was mostly driven by the appreciation of the advancement of the national education system. Estonian, Lithuanian and Polish teachers were more proud of the institution’s or teacher’s individual proficiency.

LONG-TERM IMPACT OF THE ERASMUS+ KA1 STAFF MOBILITY ON SCHOOL

Two years after the end of the project, the majority (more than 90 percent) of Erasmus+ mobility participants in all countries acknowledged that learning mobility had a long-term impact on their institution.

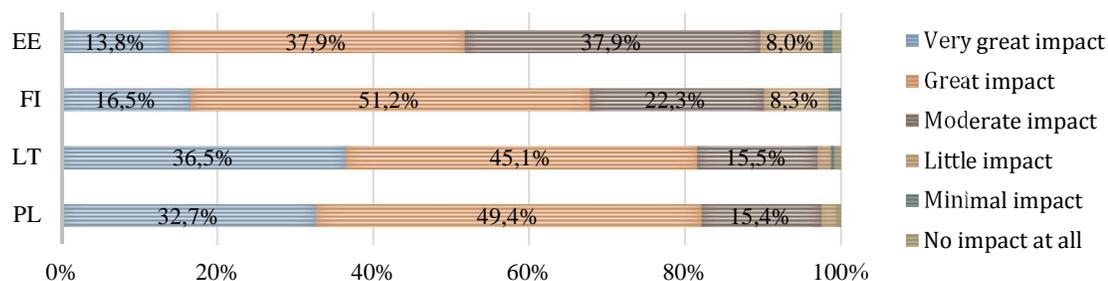


Figure 2. The overall impact of Erasmus + KA1 staff mobility on school (perception of mobile teachers)

“One really concrete thing that impacts the students as well is that we have received lots of international visitors <...> That brings internationality home to our students!” (FI)

„I think that we are going in the right direction, and that we are becoming a school, that could be called an “international school” (PL)

Mobility experience undertaken by the staff had significantly contributed to the **schools’ internationalisation**. The wide range of the post-project international activities, with various partner institutions, had been carried out by the schools (visiting partner schools, continuing learning mobility projects, initiating and applying for the new project grants). In many cases, the mobility of teachers had contributed to similar international learning experiences organised for learners.

The implementation of Erasmus+ KA1 projects contributed to the **improvement of the schools’ image**. The awareness of being more internationalised seems to be a factor that positively distinguishes schools in the local educational field and is considered as a value-enhancing factor in terms of school competitiveness.

According to the research participants, the long-term contribution of mobility was the enhancement of teaching quality. The persistent **application of new teaching methods**, increased usage of ICT, the introduction of different elements of a foreign language into non-language subjects. This had the positive impact of the learners’ involvement and motivation, though, the agreement that Erasmus+ staff mobility contributed to better learning outcomes of students was much lower.

The modernisation of the schools’ equipment was also mentioned as the direct long-term project outcome. In the participants’ opinion, the vast majority of the needs to modernise the equipment stemmed directly from the new knowledge and competencies acquired abroad. In can be concluded, that the new knowledge and international experience, gained during the project, required modern tools and new equipment resulting in higher teaching quality.

Some country-specific aspects of the perceptions of the long-term impact on the institution in the area of teaching innovations were revealed. While Polish and Lithuanian teachers declared the higher long-term impact of the mobility on the institution in terms of organisational changes, Finnish and Estonian teachers emphasised the importance of focusing on preserving the existing good practices instead of the radical introduction of new ones.

Perception about the long-term benefits of Erasmus+ KA1 staff mobility for the strategic development of the school is partly determined by the consistency of the national education policy and its implementation. In Finnish and Estonian schools, the anticipation for the changes brought by the staff mobility was relatively lower, meaning that the need to change existing teaching practices and /or the school's strategic direction was not the primary focus. Polish and Lithuanian teachers had relatively higher expectations about using mobility results in the strategic development of the school. This difference in attitudes can be explained by the different achievements of national education systems. The educational achievements of Estonia and Finland are highly rated, and education systems are valued as advanced in a European context.

FACTORS OF SUSTAINABILITY

"It is important that the project is part of the school's regular operations, and included in the annual development plan, so that everyone feels that it is part of 'normal work' instead of something detached and extra." (FI)

The longitudinal study pointed out to the outstanding relevance of the factors ensuring the sustainability of the Erasmus+ staff mobility outcomes. All the heads of school and teachers placed high importance of the **strategic approach** for the project's results to have a long term impact and sustain in the organisation. The alignment between the strategy of the organisation and goals of the professional development programmes plays a vital role in the changes to become permanent. Organisational stability in terms of clear vision and strategic focus approaching professional development abroad individually, according to the school's developmental paths and current needs is a precondition for achieving permanent results.

Institutional support in the form of managerial decisions was pointed out as an essential factor for the learning mobility results to sustain. The management plays an essential role at analysing the needs of a school in terms of professional development, planning of activities, ensuring regular learning and cooperation opportunities to all teachers, allocating time for activities that support the regular and systemic application of innovations, peer-to-peer learning. The time and other resource management activities are needed for implementing innovations as available, simple and convenient as possible.

"To find followers. It is most important. And now those followers are doing such things! It's amazing to see! And we encourage teachers to engage further." (LT)

Sustainable implementation of the project results requires **teacher leadership**. Both teachers and school heads claimed that the positive teachers' attitude, initiative, open and honest knowledge sharing, inspiring and involving others, mentoring other teachers had the significant impact on the final success of the project and sustainability of its outcomes'.

For the project results benefitting the whole school in the long term **knowledge sharing in the form of peer-to-peer learning**, is essential. Sharing of experience in the form of peer-learning served project result sustainability in the way of transferring the learning experiences to the broader organisational context, strengthening and empowering professional learning community (supporting organisational learning), and helping for re-consideration and self-reflection of new teaching practices, assigning more deep meaning to this. The methods that the teachers found the most effective and useful were the more informal discussions with colleagues in this way emphasising the fact that the value of the informal mode of sharing information over a cup of coffee is currently slightly underestimated in the formal evaluation of the projects.

"Thanks to sharing experience, we could form one whole from the experiences of different teachers, and this whole can be used in all subjects and by all the teachers." (EE)

Some country-specific aspects of sharing experience were determined during the study. The results indicate while Lithuanian teachers saw a deep meaning in sharing the experience, communicating, collaborating, engaging in joint professional networks with other schools, Polish teachers showed a great

interest in strengthening teamwork at school and collaborating with foreign partners. Estonian schools emphasised the importance of the win-win situation when sharing the experience (sharing expertise with hopes of mutual benefits offered for the school development). Finnish teachers were also more inclined toward cooperation within the institution colleagues when working together for the advanced implementation of the national curricula.

“The director encourages, announces and informs. He always has something positive to say. He even takes part in the initiatives, writes projects. He has no problem with such an engagement and teachers become the part of this process.” (PL)

“Now I have passed the initiative to another teacher. We are, of course, working together, but she is now leading.” (LT)

Support from the school leader in the way of a leader’s personal commitment and engagement was considered as another significant factor for the sustainability of the project results. Support from the school leader from the initial to the final stage of the project and after the project end (ensuring the match of the professional development with overall school strategy, trusting the teacher as an expert of her or his field, providing the needed resources, making the supportive work-load arrangements, etc.) was found as the vital aspect for the project results’ sustainability. It was found that the behavioural support (the real steps taken by the leader) to compare with the attitudinal support had a higher impact on the overall long-term impact of the project results on school.

The supportive role of school colleagues’ is another important determinant factor of sustainability of the project results. The majority of teachers reported that colleagues supported the implementation of Erasmus+ ideas by taking over the ideas of mobility. It was revealed that the real steps taken by the colleagues (taking the challenge to try Erasmus+ staff mobility ideas in their practice, overtaking leadership role) had a stronger impact on the overall long-term impact of the project on an organisation than the attitudinal support (expression of interest from colleagues). The level of community support determines whether a project becomes a part of the institution’s life.

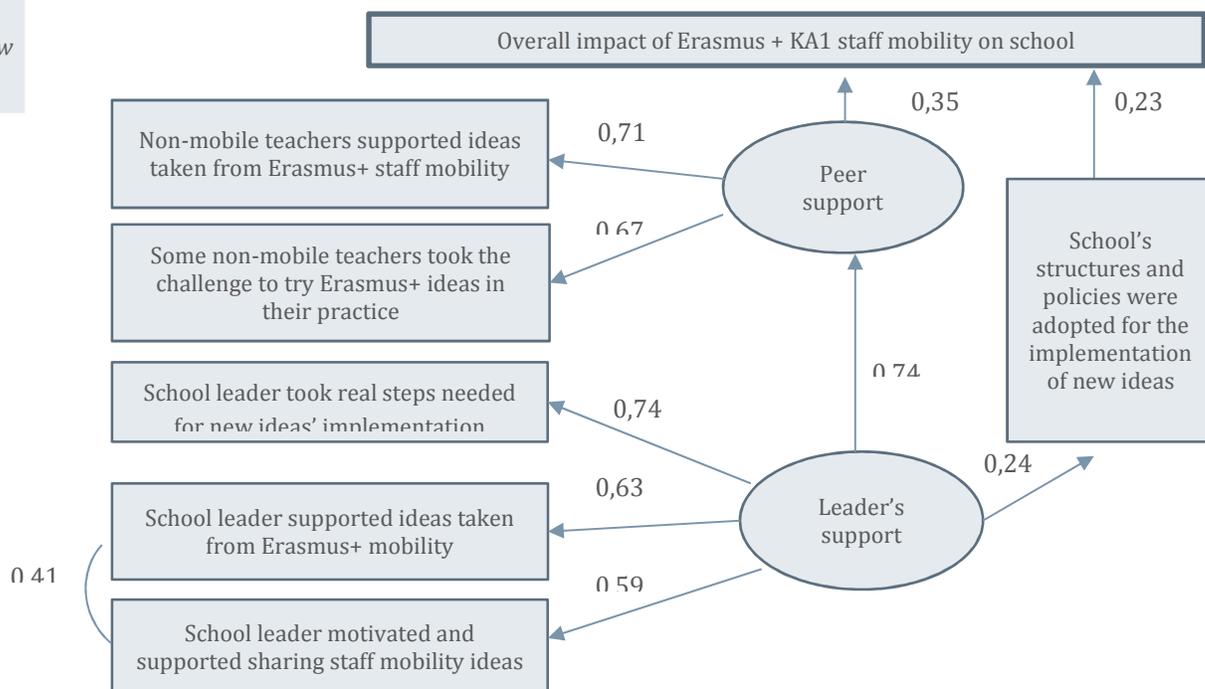


Figure 3. The relationship between school-related factors and overall impact of the Erasmus + KA1 staff mobility on school

RECOMMENDATIONS

Seeking to ensure the long-term impact and sustainability of the results of Erasmus+KA1 staff mobility projects, the following recommendations are provided:

For school stakeholders' and municipality-level politicians

To be more interested in and support schools' projects that develop schools' international dimension, improve schools' image and enable teachers for the teaching paradigm shift.

For the institutions coordinating the activities of ERASMUS+ KA1 action (the European Commission and National Agencies)

(1) To further support the grants for the professional development of joint teams because learning and working in teams are one of the features of a learning organisation that must be maintained and strengthened. Such an approach proves to have a more significant long-term impact on organisation development.

(2) To prioritise the activities of the dissemination of project results, which have the nature of collegial interaction and peer-to-peer learning (workshops, laboratories, academies, etc.) to compare with the valorisation activities (messages in the media).

(3) For supporting the sustainability of the project results to develop a financial support mechanism for the schools that have implemented Erasmus KA1 staff mobility projects and have achieved exceptionally excellent results.

(4) Special measures could be considered by the programme or national authorities for enhancing the sustainability of the project results (e.g., extra day after mobility for reflecting and planning the dissemination activities).

For school managers and teachers

(1) Emphasising the maintenance of the coherence with the school's strategic goals in all phases of a project (preparation of the project application, planning and implementation of the project activities, monitoring and evaluation of the results, ensuring sustainability).

(2) The sustainability aspect should be more emphasised in the project planning phase and be more clearly described in the application.

(3) When planning the dissemination of the project, the main focus should be paid to the events whose format entails peer-to-peer interaction and learning from the professional practice (workshops, academies, laboratories, etc.).

(4) Testing the new ideas leaving the individual freedom for teachers to make choices. The proven ideas that are suitable for achieving the desired goals, to integrate into the long-term plans (e.g., curricula).

(5) Considering the Erasmus+ KA projects as an instrument for improving the general school community competences (project management, language, networking).

(6) Looking for financial and other resources' management solutions (teacher workload allocation, payroll, educational equipment and environment) required for the continuous implementation of project ideas and the long-term delivery of the results. The modifications of the arrangements of school schedule by allocating time for joint testing of teacher-led innovations in professional practice, collegial feedback, assessment and reflection of the achieved results, discussions and the acceptance of the agreements on the continuity (restructuring timetable, adjustment of form and content of staff meetings).