

Study investigates why students seek international experience

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Why do students want to go abroad for a semester or take part in international conferences? A [new study](#) by the University of Würzburg has investigated this question and the results offer recommendations for

an internationalization strategy. The research is published in *Andragoška spoznanja* ([link to PDF in English](#)).

- "I spoke to some people who had been there the year before and then, because they recommended it to me, I went there too."
- "My professor called me and told me that I could apply for the Winter School and that the university would pay for everything for me. So I said, 'Yes, okay. Why not?'"
- "I'm afraid that I won't be able to find a good job back home and I just wanted to upskill myself a bit."

There are many reasons why students decide to spend part of their studies abroad or gain other international experience. A new study from the field of adult and continuing education has systematically analyzed these reasons. The findings provide recommendations for the internationalization of degree programs.

The framework conditions are important

"Our study shows that even in degree programs that traditionally have a low level of internationality, internationalization is possible to a high degree with good framework conditions." This is how Regina Egetenmeyer, Professor of Adult and Continuing Education at the Institute of Education at the University of Würzburg, describes the key finding of the study.

Regina Egetenmeyer is co-author of the study with Monika Staab. According to Egetenmeyer, the study not only focuses on the subjective perspective of [student](#) motivation, but also examines the institutional structures that are essential for internationalization.

The researchers conducted interviews with a total of 22 graduates of three master's degree programs specializing in adult education at the

universities of Würzburg, Belgrade and Florence. They were not only interested in whether the interviewees had completed part of their degree program or an internship abroad. They were also interested in experiences with other forms of international teaching and learning settings, such as lectures and seminars by international guest lecturers, the presence of international students or international conferences at the home university.

Individual motives and situational incentives play together

Of course, there is usually not just one decisive reason why students decide to gain international experience. "In most cases, several individual motives and situational incentives come together," says Staab. Curiosity, a personal interest, the desire for new knowledge or [better opportunities](#) on the labor market are just a few of them.

In fact, Staab and Egetenmeyer were able to identify different motives for participating in international teaching and learning situations among the graduates of the three master's programs. These can be categorized into academic, career-related, personal, social and language-related reasons as well as external circumstances.

"Many of those surveyed said that their participation in international programs was motivated by the desire to get to know different teaching and learning methods and to learn about studying education and adult education in another country," says Staab, describing a motive that falls within the academic sphere. A clearly career-related reason is the respondents' assessment that future employers value international experience and that this gives them an advantage when looking for a job.

Personal reasons come into play when interviewees report that they

perceive studying abroad as a challenge and express the hope of growing from this experience. This category also includes the desire to get to know the host country and region and to explore it as a tourist—as well as the statement that attending a winter school offers the opportunity to take a two-week break from everyday life and to concentrate fully on yourself and your studies during this time.

Addressing students' uncertainties

Even though the study is based on the experiences of students from the field of adult and continuing education, its findings offer starting points for degree programs in other disciplines that are wondering how they can promote the international mobility of their students. "It is important for universities to establish attractive support structures for internationalization in order to address students' uncertainties and existing doubts," says Egetenmeyer.

This includes, for example, early contact with international academics at partner universities and exchanges with students who have already completed a degree program abroad or are currently visiting their home university. In addition, teaching and learning settings are needed that enable international and intercultural experiences without a high financial or time investment, such as international workshops and conferences, winter and summer schools—offers that relate to the keyword internationalization at home.

"This makes it possible for students who do not have the necessary financial and time resources to study abroad to gain international and intercultural experience during their studies," says Staab.

For the two authors, this is not the end of the story. They suggest further studies to investigate why many students are not interested in international programs. These could provide further insights and uncover

weaknesses in the existing organizational structures, according to the researchers. It could also be interesting to take a closer look at the virtual range of international teaching and learning settings. This has expanded significantly during the coronavirus pandemic. However, the recently published study did not take virtual forms into account.

More information: Monika Staab et al, Students' Reasons for Participating in International Teaching and Learning Settings in Adult Education Degree Programmes, *Andragoška spoznanja* (2023). [DOI: 10.4312/as/13388](https://doi.org/10.4312/as/13388)

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