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### Internationalisation in School

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The European Commission provides a number of co-funding grants which enable organisations to obtain international experience, and provide individuals with opportunities to develop the competencies which are more important than ever. Due to globalisation, technology development and mass migration young people encounter international environment, new languages and cultures which are different from the ones at home. Living in such a society requires comprehensive education and training in which intercultural competencies hold an important place. Their development can be stimulated through internationalised education and training, as well as the school's and teachers' culture. In this article we present the concept of internationalisation and its main two types (internationalisation at home, internationalisation abroad), along with the Study of the Impact of the Lifelong Learning Programme on basic and upper-secondary education with respect to national priorities. Furthermore, we wanted to outline the significance of international cooperation for the development of the internationalisation of the school and its related impact.

*Keywords: Internationalisation at home, internationalisation abroad, intercultural competencies, Erasmus+*

#### Introduction

Education plays a significant role in the social and economic development of a country, while internationalisation constitutes one of its essential components. Through the implementation of Erasmus+ programme the Slovenian national agency, i.e. CMEPIUS, supports international activity, and such activity further supports the development of organisations' internationalisation and individuals' cultural competencies, since the latter are becoming an increasingly essential requirements for a successful life today.

The term internationalisation first found its way into the Erasmus+ programme call documentation in the first year of its implementation. One of the main aims of the Erasmus+ programme is to “foster quality improvements, innovation excellence and internationalisation at the level of education and training institutions, in particular through enhanced transnational cooperation between education and training providers and other stakeholders.” To achieve this we expect that the institutions participating in the programme will increase: “their capacity to operate at EU/international level: improved management skills and internationalisation strategies; reinforced cooperation with partners from other countries; increased allocation of financial resources (other than EU funds) to organise EU/international projects; increased quality in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and follow up of EU/international projects” (European Commission, 2016). Moreover, it also requires that institutions align the needs of participants with their internal internationalisation plans.

The programme encourages organisations to work in international environments and, even more important, prepares pupils and students for life and work in intercultural environments. In the applications for grants for the implementation of international learning mobility of secondary school students, internationalisation is an integral component of school's development plan, which is one of the elements assuring the quality of the project. The aims of the Erasmus+ programme require that a strategic partnership project in itself requires good international integration of the proposed activities and results, therefore a contribution from participating organisations is also required in this area. With respect to the enclosed grant applications we found that the applicants are mostly not adequately familiar with the term and/or that they do not dedicate adequate attention to internationalisation of education and organisations.

In 2015 the European Commission published the first call for the acquisition of the Erasmus+ VET mobility charter,<sup>1</sup> in which special priority was given to internationalisation. The aim of the Charter is to encourage organisations with demonstrated quality in the implementation of international mobility of VET students and staff to develop European internationalisation strategies. Besides the completed application form secondary vocational and technical schools had to enclose their internationalisation strategies for the period from 2015 to 2020. It was revealed that several of the applied secondary schools have no concrete international development plans. Nevertheless, a few schools stood out with their clear vision of international involvement, exceeding the national approaches to vocational education and training. We live in a quickly changing world and reflection on where and how we will live and work is thus even more significant. The minister of education Ms Maja Makovec Brenčič also included internationalisation in the strategic objectives of the Slovenian education system and stresses that by joining the international environment and by transferring foreign practice schools can improve their quality. The key element for the attainment of this objective is a well-designed and constructive development of supporting environments. In her speech at the Professional Meeting of Head Teachers in Secondary Education 2015 she highlighted in that in the heart of our internationalisation lies not only the openness of the school system, but the openness of the overall society. On the occasion she added that knowledge knows no boundaries and it constitutes our joint responsibility and a great challenge for our future.

The term internationalisation originates from a period preceding the establishment of universities. In the past it was used primarily in the fields of higher education, policy and science (Knight 2005; 2006). However, in recent decades internationalisation reached new dimensions as a result of economic, social and political changes at a global scale. Today, internationalisation represents a driver of change in education; a concept, which the schools follow, live by, and use to underpin their work. Internationalisation also means the creation skills required in the 21st century, while another key topic today are also intercultural competencies, including knowledge, tolerance to unclear and unforeseeable situations, adaptability, awareness of one's own cultural identity, openness towards new experience, consideration of opinions, ability to adapt to the values of others, ethical conduct, patience, enthusiasm, interpersonal skills, self-expression, empathy and a sense of humour (Van Eyken et al, 2005).

If a decade ago we promoted international projects, followed by international cooperation, today the most advanced education systems see the future in the internationalisation of schools. This is a term, broader than project cooperation and international mobility. It is its aim to equip learners and teachers with intercultural content and competencies to simplify life and work in an intercultural world. However, intercultural experience in itself is inadequate. What is needed is the systematic teaching of intercultural competencies (Deardorff 2009, Vrečer 2009; 2013). Today, we can – more than ever – encounter intercultural meetings in our close surroundings. We do not need to cross the national border to find different cultures, languages and religions. Interaction of different cultures has become a part of our everyday lives. In the Guidelines of the International Commission on Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Mr Jack Delors wrote that education is based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (Delors 1996). The guideline “learning how to live together” was specifically highlighted by the European Commission during the refugee crises, since it means respect of diversity and equality. This means tolerance and openness towards others and differences. The intercultural impact was also foreseen in the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia, published in 2011, in which the authors wrote “It is possible to predict with a very high probability that Slovenia will become a multi-cultural country marked by intensive intercultural impact, therefore we must start thinking about the future today and begin preparing the current generations for a life in changed circumstances. We can foresee that our society will become increasingly open also for the migration of people from other cultural environments, therefore it is important to raise and educate people for mutual respect and dialogue.” (Krek and Metljak 2011) The main challenge today is no longer to overcome geographical distance, but to overcome cultural gaps.

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/education/calls/0514\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/calls/0514_en.htm).

## Definition of internationalisation in school

Knight (2005) claims internationalisation is not a new term, since it has been in use for centuries, mainly in the field of politics and intercountry relations at the governmental level. However, its use in the field of education emerged in the 80s of the previous century, while the terms international education or international cooperation were used to refer to this concept. In the beginning internationalisation was mostly linked to outgoing international mobility, which is something we know the most. One's personal experience acquired abroad is definitely a priceless lesson in life, which cannot be substituted by learning in class. With its co-funding schemes European Commission facilitate an increasing number of such mobility each year, while the impact of *internationalisation abroad* is evident both at the level of individuals as well as at the level of institutions where individuals learn or teach. As the national agency CMEPIUS examined such impact with the Study of Impact of the Lifelong Learning Programme on basic and upper secondary education from the aspect of national priorities. The study revealed that international cooperation can bring long-term positive effects on teachers and students, as well as on the organisation. However, the extent of impact depends on school's management and the integration of the relevant project in the organisational strategic plans (CMEPIUS 2013).

This time we will use the study to extract the criteria demonstrating the internationalisation of the school, since this "is not an objective, but the path to improve the quality of teaching and learning" (Beelen 2015). Which are the relevant internationalisation elements of international cooperation? When measuring the organisational impact we can highlight the contacts of teachers and preschool teachers with foreign teachers and preschool teachers, recognisability of the school/kindergarten in the local environment, openness of the school/kindergarten towards the local environment and broader, staff foreign language communication skills, cooperation and coordination among teachers/preschool teachers (project work, transversal connections). We proved a long term positive impact on the operation of the organisation from the aspect of all above-listed criteria.

When measuring the impact of international cooperation on the work of teachers, about two thirds of criteria can be linked to internationalisation, meaning that through participation teachers acquire several elements/aspects of internationalisation which provide them with the required intellectual broadness and the ability to teach by taking into consideration the global knowledge and the empowerment of students for life in the 21st century. Here, we will highlight only the criteria with a long-term positive impact on teachers, i.e.: enrichment of subject content, inclusion of their own culture and heritage in teaching, improved relationship between the teacher and pupils/students, teachers' awareness of the common EU heritage, awareness of European cultural and moral values, and respect for different cultures. Knowledge of foreign cultures and customs also increases interest in one's own cultural heritage and thus enriches the individual in two areas at once.

The criteria used for measuring the impact of international cooperation on pupils/students can be summarised with the term internationalisation in school. Why do we opt for international cooperation if not because of pupils and students? Since we want to empower youth with knowledge, information, intellectual broadness and openness, daringness, courage, and intercultural competencies due to multilingualism, in order for them to become more tolerant, etc. We also highlighted the long-term positive effects of international cooperation on pupils and students, which we could detect due to internationalisation. These criteria include knowledge and awareness of different cultures, self-confidence when using and speaking foreign languages, desire to collaborate with peers at home and abroad, interest for other EU countries and their culture, and awareness of diversity. Otherwise, international cooperation mainly impacts the non-cognitive aspects of pupils' and students' learning: their motivation, independence, desire for language learning, desire for cooperation with peers from other countries. However, these elements are a prerequisite for the acquisition of knowledge.

Regardless of financial support received by participants in mobility it is a fact that a large majority of people (95%) do not exploit this opportunity. The key question, implying a step forward in the quality of education, is how to develop international competencies for successful management of cultural differences with that majority of pupils/students, who never decide to participate in mobility. On this basis the concept of

*internationalisation at home* was developed at the end of the previous century. The term is very complex and constitutes one of the most significant components of internationalisation. Internationalisation at home and/or internationalisation in school include all those international activities besides mobility abroad which take place exclusively in school or in its local environment. The main elements through which we can develop intercultural competencies include the curriculum, teaching/learning modes, extra-curricular activities, cooperation with the local environment and research/project activity (Knight 2006). Through thematic monitoring of projects from the Erasmus+ programme and its predecessor the Lifelong Learning programme, and through workshops implemented at the Professional Consultation of Head Teachers 2015 the national agency - CMEPIUS found that Slovenian schools (both basic and upper secondary) already implement – to a large extent – the activities which can be categorised under the above-specified types of internationalisation. Under internationalisation abroad the majority of school representatives listed participation in mobility projects and partnerships under the Erasmus+ programme, while they also listed UNESCO camps and different field trips of head teachers upon initiative of the municipality. However, school representatives were not that familiar with the term of internationalisation at home. Nevertheless there was a broad range of various activities which can be categorised in this group and are carried out independently by the schools, with their own funds or funding from the municipality, parents, sponsors, etc. Such activities include international singing camps and competitions, international sports competitions, twinning with foreign schools, EPI reading badge, visits of foreign students at the school and projects such as volunteering, European Village, Say Hello to the World, Moving Boundaries, integration of migrant children in Slovenian schools, etc.

We also found that from the pupils' perspective the acquisition and development of intercultural competencies are usually not the most significant guiding principles of the listed activities. Raising awareness of the objectives as well as of the need to develop intercultural competencies would definitely contribute to the development of an internationalised individual and an internationalised school. Therefore it is essential that internationalisation is strategically embedded in the school's development plan, while the level of empowerment of students with intercultural competencies very much depends on each specific teacher, since teachers do not teach with words only, but by setting an example and through their actions. With respect to this the head teacher can assist by strengthening such culture in school, which promotes and develops tolerance, openness, equality, critical thinking and intercultural dialogue.

Why do we need internationalisation at home? Because of the world, which is becoming increasingly connected through various technologies, and where even the remotest villages can no longer hide from globalisation. Despite staying at home, we live and work in an increasingly multi-cultural environment, therefore we must be ready. International cooperation provides us with an insight into inter-culturalism and multilingualism, while preparing us for the life in an increasingly multi-cultural world. For all of those who remain at home we must ways to cope with these challenges and acquire these competencies. Awareness of this fact is significant for a higher quality of our life and a successful career in the future. The key aspect is to become aware of multi-culturalism and to raise awareness thereof, since this is the only way to acquire intercultural competencies. Steps towards internationalisation can already be observed today, but they are also required in the future. These steps will not be simple. For a better tomorrow we need young people capable of cosmopolitan thinking with an open and tolerant view who will know how to communicate between and across different cultures, and we will need these people at home. (Flander 2015).

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