DOI: https://doi.org/10.46502/issn.1856-7576/2022.16.03.11

# Development of online and offline academic mobility of students in modern conditions

# Desarrollo de la movilidad académica en línea y fuera de línea de los estudiantes en condiciones modernas

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Recibido: 16/05/22 Aceptado: 22/08/22

# **Abstract**

The purpose of the research lies in identifying the problematic aspects of ensuring academic mobility of students in the conditions of distance learning. The research methodology consists of the methods as follows: statistical, scientific abstraction, analogy, comparison, analysis, synthesis, graphic, tabular, systematization,

generalization. The results of the research prove that the academic mobility of students is one of the effective methods of exchanging experience, knowledge and professional skills in order to increase the competitiveness of the future specialist and his ability to meet the requirements of the globalized labour market. In the course of the research, the problems of ensuring the academic mobility of students have been identified, namely: a low level of awareness of the possibilities of academic mobility, motivation and their financial capacity, the lack of interrelationship between the level of education and income, low rates of development of virtual academic mobility. Taking into consideration the downward trends in the participation of students from Ukraine in EU projects on academic mobility (969 in 2018, 852 in 2019, 1191 in 2020, respectively), it is proposed to intensify the process of obtaining a double diploma by students; to form a mechanism for guaranteeing further employment with a high level of remuneration; to introduce programs of educational crediting of academic mobility by commercial banks.

**Key words:** higher education seekers, educational process, distance learning, academic mobility, single educational space.

#### Resumen

El propósito de la investigación radica en identificar los aspectos problemáticos para garantizar la movilidad académica de los estudiantes en las condiciones de la educación a distancia. La metodología de la investigación consta de los siguientes métodos: estadístico, abstracción científica, analogía, comparación, análisis, síntesis, gráfica, tabular, sistematización, generalización. Los resultados de la investigación prueban que la movilidad académica de los estudiantes es uno de los métodos efectivos de intercambio de experiencias, conocimientos y habilidades profesionales con el fin de incrementar la competitividad del futuro especialista y su capacidad para atender los requerimientos del mercado laboral globalizado. En el transcurso de la investigación, se han identificado los problemas para garantizar la movilidad académica de los estudiantes, a saber: un bajo nivel de conciencia de las posibilidades de movilidad académica, motivación y su capacidad financiera, la falta de interrelación entre el nivel de educación y ingresos, bajos índices de desarrollo de la movilidad académica virtual. Teniendo en cuenta las tendencias a la baja en la participación de estudiantes de Ucrania en proyectos de la UE sobre movilidad académica (969 en 2018, 852 en 2019, 1191 en 2020, respectivamente), se propone intensificar el proceso de obtención de una doble titulación por parte de los estudiantes; formar un mecanismo para garantizar más empleo con un alto nivel de remuneración; introducir programas de acreditación educativa de movilidad académica por parte de la banca comercial.

Palabras clave: buscadores de educación superior, proceso educativo, educación a distancia, movilidad académica, espacio único educativo.

#### 1. Introduction

Achieving the goals of the Bologna process and the formation of a single global educational space are considered among the priority tasks and directions of development of national educational systems. Ensuring effective exchange of experience, knowledge, national values, interactive networks, implementation of joint research projects and conducting scientific investigations contribute to the development of international educational integration and allow improving the quality and accessibility of education. Under such conditions, academic mobility becomes of particular importance, which involves obtaining opportunities to study, teach, undergo internships and carry out scientific activities in institutions of higher education or in scientific institutions both on the territory of a certain country and outside its borders on the conditions of preserving the place of study of students and the teachers' main work place.

The issue of studying the academic mobility of students has become particularly acute during the transition to mixed and distance learning mode, caused by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the full-scale military invasion of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine. It is obvious that the specified topic is extremely relevant and requires the study and detailing of the features and problems of ensuring the academic mobility of students in current conditions.

The purpose of the research lies in identifying the problematic aspects of ensuring academic mobility of students in the conditions of distance learning.

# 2. Literature Review

The processes of integration into the world educational space intensify the need for standardization and development of international academic mobility, which is especially relevant in the conditions of modern challenges and dangers necessitating the transition to a distance form of obtaining education. In this context, Silva et al. (2020) defines the strategies of distance education and are convinced that it is the distance form of learning that contributes to the development of academic mobility of students, as it provides a possibility for active participation in projects using a virtual environment and does not require students to stay outside the country.

Vovchuk et al. (2021) consider the academic mobility of students in the conditions of distance learning as one of the effective ways to exchange knowledge and increase the competitiveness of future specialists, while highlighting both its positive and negative factors. In particular, scientists identify the following positive aspects, namely: the ability and skills of students to freely choose ways of interacting with the environment, establishing intercultural communication, the ability to consider their country through the prism of cross-culture and comparison with the cultures of other countries. From among the main problems of academic mobility of students, the following should be highlighted, namely: the lack of proper material, technical and financial support, insufficient number of specialists coordinating activities in this direction, lack of appropriate infrastructure that

allows effective exchange of students, insufficient development of the system of informing about programs of academic mobility of students, as well as low level of students' legal knowledge about the possibilities of their participation in academic mobility. Therefore, Kovbatiuk & Shevchuk (2020) claim that the constant development of educational integration, which allows implementing the basic principles of academic mobility of students, including in the conditions of distance learning, is of great importance.

Gopaul & Pifer (2016) also follow a similar standpoint and consider academic mobility as a promising direction of educational integration into a single world space, and Shvydun (2021) believes that it as a tool for the modernization of national educational systems and the professional success of future specialists.

In the conditions of 2019–2022, the issue of access of higher education seekers to the educational process became more acute as a result of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and military operations on the territory of Ukraine; consequently, this has led to the actualization of the issue of the development of virtual academic mobility in the context of the informatization of social life, which has become the subject of scientific studies of Savitska & Livitska (2022).

At the same time, Liu, Che et al. (2022) emphasize the dominant influence of the factor of globalization on the academic mobility of students, forasmuch as the dissemination of knowledge in the international dimension is an extremely necessary and important task of our time; after all, academic mobility stimulates the internationalization of higher education, and, according to the viewpoint of Pedersen (2021), is professionally significant for future specialists; therefore, it should be implemented within the framework of specific educational programs.

Moreover, Van der Wende (2015) has investigated that the academic mobility of students activates the process of attracting international talents, which guarantees the innovative development of the country, and intercontinental mobility allows reducing disparities between countries in terms of skill shortages. However, Liu, Liang et al. (2022) believe that the European model of education and ensuring the academic mobility of students is more perfect, and the educational process in institutions of higher education in the countries of the European Union is more effective than in the countries of Asia; therefore, tendencies are observed towards activating the academic mobility of students in compliance with the European direction of development.

Stoicheva (2022) considers academic mobility as a condition for the modernization of higher education in the countries of the European Union; the scholar is convinced that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the development of international cooperation in the direction of distance format and accelerated those changes that were inevitable in the development of education and innovative technologies. At the same time, the scientist claims that such countries as Great Britain (15 %), France (10 %) and Germany (10 %) have the highest share of foreign students.

Undoubtedly, the European educational space is highly developed and capable of providing support to developing countries. A clear example of such international cooperation is the European Union's Erasmus+ educational program, which is effectively implemented in an online learning environment, and since 2020, it is a response to the challenge of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, Koris et al. (2021) consider the international academic mobility of students as a tool for the internationalization of higher educational institutions, which allows acquiring, in addition to professional and language skills, digital communication skills. However, scientists assess certain risks of academic mobility of students in the conditions of distance learning, which are manifested in the increase in the level of outflow of intellectual capital from countries with a lower level of development and its inflow into highly developed countries. As a result, structural deformations occur in both national and international educational systems. In addition, significant differences in the social-economic status of students also significantly affect their academic mobility, which is confirmed by the level of access of students to academic mobility.

Yıldırım et al. (2021) note a decrease in cooperation between institutions of higher education and business structures, which affects the decrease in the level of students' acquisition of practical skills in the learning process. At the same time, the transition to distance learning has intensified the development of online education and created new learning methods. The comments of Kercher, J. (2021) are relevant, who argues that the academic mobility of students in distance learning conditions leads to a decrease in the number of higher education seekers who seek to study in other countries, forasmuch as most of them seek to combine study abroad with employment, which becomes impossible with distance learning. This theory is shared by Kim (2017), who claims that academic mobility of students is a way of crossing international borders for the purpose of further employment abroad.

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have stimulated the beginning of the process of reformatting the global educational system and necessitated structural changes in national educational systems. The problems that have arisen in the process of such restructuring were supplemented by risks and threats to the world education system caused by the military confrontation of Ukraine against the armed aggression of the Russian Federation, forasmuch as a significant number of higher education seekers, whose share is estimated at 43,71 % of the total number (World Migration Report, 2022), were forcibly relocated to the territory of European countries, where they continue their studies and do not plan to return to Ukraine.

Thus, the issue of investigating the academic mobility of students in the conditions of distance learning acquires special importance and requires in-depth study.

# 3. Materials and Methods

The research methodology consists of the following methods of economic analysis, namely: a statistical method used to study the dynamics of the number of foreign students



in Ukraine and Ukrainian students abroad; method of scientific abstraction, analogies and comparison in order to identify the main problems of academic mobility of students under conditions of distance learning; the method of analysis and synthesis in order to determine the essence of the "academic mobility of students" concept; graphical and tabular analysis in order to display the obtained research results; method of systematization and generalization for the purpose of formulating conclusions.

The information base of the research includes the works of domestic and foreign scientists, reports of international organizations, in particular as follows: World Migration Report, 2022; IIE Center for Academic Mobility Research and Impact, 2018; National Office Erasmus, 2021: National Office Erasmus+UA, 2021.

# 4. Results

The strengthening of the influence of modern challenges and threats intensifies the need to make transformational changes in the development of the existing education system, review approaches, methods and models of education, as well as ensure proper conditions of access to the educational process. The COVID-19 pandemic and the aggravation of the military conflict on the territory of Ukraine has made it impossible for education seekers to get access to the educational process and intensified the necessity of transition to the implementation of the educational process in a digital environment. It becomes obvious that traditional methods, forms and models of education have lost their relevance, and the transfer of a significant share of higher education seekers from Ukraine to the territory of other countries and the need for access to the educational process in non-standard conditions has exacerbated the problem of harmonizing the national system of higher education with the European one.

Undoubtedly, the academic mobility of students for a long period of time has been in the centre of attention and is one of the strategic directions of the development of higher education institutions and the organization of the educational process in these establishments, forasmuch as it provides an opportunity for students to establish an effective cultural dialogue, expand the boundaries of their horizons, acquire new unique professional skills, and that is not least importantly, to improve knowledge and skills in foreign languages. In addition, academic mobility contributes to increasing the competitiveness of future specialists both on the domestic and international labour market and, at the same time, significantly affects the improvement of the quality indicators of education and science in the country, which brings national educational systems closer to the requirements of international educational standards, and also increases the general level of education of the population.

It is worth noting that Ukraine has taken significant steps in the direction of activating the academic mobility of students, in particular, the participation of Ukraine in the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union deserves particular attention, according to which, during 2015–2020, more than 11 532 students had the opportunity to study in institutions of

higher education in Europe and 5 474 foreign students acquire knowledge and professional skills in higher education institutions of Ukraine (Figure 1).

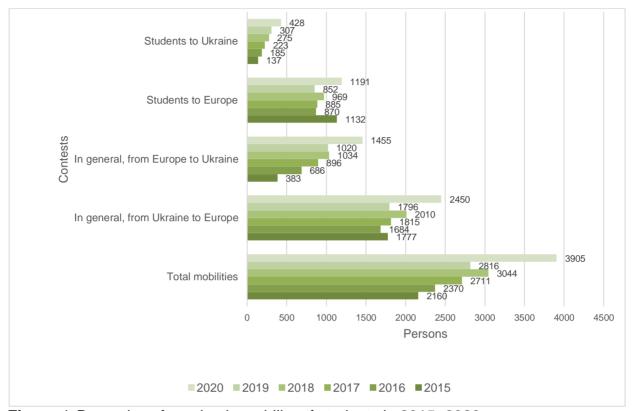


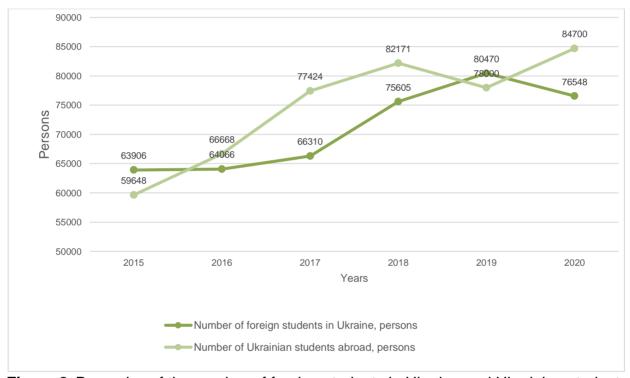
Figure 1. Dynamics of academic mobility of students in 2015–2020. Source: it has been complied based on Participation of Ukrainian organizations in the EU-Funded Programme Erasmus+ 2014–2020. (National Office Erasmus+UA, 2021)

In general, as evidenced by the results of the conducted studies, the dynamics of mobility is characterized by a growing trend in the period 2015–2018. In 2019, a slight decrease was observed from 3040 to 2816, however, in 2020, a sharp increase to 3905 was recorded. At the same time, the analysis shows that the external academic mobility has an advantage over the internal ones, which confirms the predominance of the number of students leaving for European countries over those moving to Ukraine. However, it should be noted that the flow of students to Europe cannot be characterized as stable throughout the analysed period, as evidenced by certain cyclical changes. As for the flow of foreign students into Ukraine, there is a clear and stable upward trend, even in the crisis period of 2019.

In general, assessing the trends of student mobility, it can be stated that the period 2015–2018 is characterized by upward trends; in 2019 a decrease in the number of Ukrainian students abroad was recorded, however, in 2020 the situation improved (Figure 2).

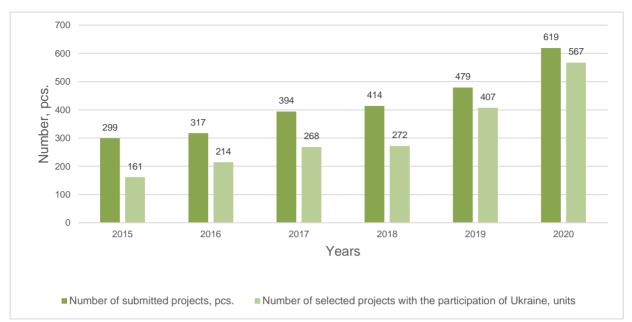
Poland, Germany, Spain, Lithuania and Romania are among the most active countries of the European Union cooperating with Ukraine within the framework of projects on academic mobility of students. It should be noted that from among foreign students studying in Ukraine as of 2020, the majority are from India (18 095 persons), Morocco (8 832 persons) and Turkmenistan (5 322 persons).

At the same time, within the framework of the Erasmus+ Program implemented by the European Union, the number of submitted projects on the organization of academic mobility of students increases every year (Figure 3).



*Figure 2.* Dynamics of the number of foreign students in Ukraine and Ukrainian students abroad in 2015–2020.

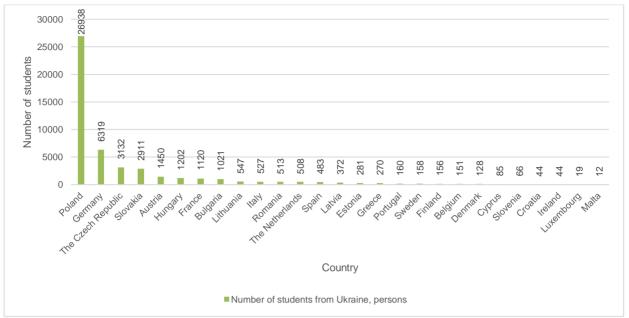
Source: it has been complied based on Foreign students in Ukraine (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2021)



**Figure 3.** Dynamics of the number of submitted projects within the framework of the Erasmus+ Program and the number of selected ones implemented with the participation of Ukraine.

Source: it has been complied based on Participation of Ukrainian organizations in the EU-Funded Programme Erasmus+ 2014–2020. (National Office Erasmus+UA, 2021)

At the same time, in the conditions of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, a significant number of new challenges and unforeseen circumstances have arisen regarding ensuring the appropriate level of academic mobility of students. Taking into account the destabilizing factors, on March 2, 2022, Commissioner Maria Gabriel has announced the possibility of maximum flexibility in the implementation of Erasmus+projects, in which students of Ukraine are involved, in order to ensure continuity of activities and guarantee safety. Accordingly, the lion's share of students, participating in various academic mobility projects, are located in such countries of the European Union as Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Figure 4), which requires special attention to them on the part of the respective country.



*Figure 4.* The number of students from Ukraine studying in higher education institutions of the European Union countries in 2020, persons.

Source: it has been complied based on Russia's war against Ukraine: Ukrainian students in the EU (European Parliament, 2022)

Particular attention should be paid to the interaction between Ukraine and Poland regarding the academic mobility of students, the number of which in this country of the European Union is 55 % of the number of foreign students, because, from the Polish point of view, Ukrainian students bring significant amounts of investment to the country. A similar situation exists in Slovakia, where Ukrainian students make up 30 % of the total number of foreign students.

Thus, the situation in the field of academic mobility of students in the countries of the European Union and in Ukraine indicates the presence of a significant number of problems of ensuring its effectiveness and requires the development of effective mechanisms for solving it. Under such conditions, the establishment of international cooperation between Ukraine and the countries of the European Union on the basis of integration into a single global educational space becomes of primary importance.

# 5. Discussion

The presence of destabilizing factors in the development of world and national educational systems necessitates reformatting methods and forms of education and actualizes the development of distance education. Taking into account all the challenges of today, at the moment, appropriate conditions have been created for the formation of a single global educational space and the appropriate level of access of students to academic mobility has been ensured. It should be noted that in relation to the countries

of the European Union, the legal framework for academic mobility of students is more developed than in Ukraine, and students of foreign higher educational institutions receive a wider range of educational services. Domestic legislation is characterized by a significant level of declarativeness and does not contribute to ensuring a stable growing rate of academic mobility of students, forasmuch as there is still no mechanism for systematizing data on the components of academic mobility, the scientific base for forecasting its state and trends, as well as consequences for the society, has not been formed yet. Moreover, in modern conditions, it is possible to single out a number of issues of academic mobility of students, which have become particularly acute during the transition to distance learning, in particular as follows:

- a low level of awareness among students concerning the possibilities of academic mobility and about the terms of enrolment in specific programs, financing of the mobility period, about living conditions and about the possibilities of receiving grants and scholarships, which requires the activation of the activities of higher educational institutions in the direction of strengthening informational support for students regarding participation in academic mobility programs;
- 2) low level of student motivation; after all, most academic mobility programs involve simultaneous study in two institutions of higher education, which increases the load on students. The solution to the mentioned problem can be achieved by providing students with the opportunity to receive a double diploma and guaranteeing future employment prospects;
- 3) low level of financial capacity of students, forasmuch as current expenses, travel and accommodation expenses are paid by students' parents, which involves substantiating the possibility of full or partial state financing of academic mobility programs and the introduction of a system of crediting educational programs related to academic mobility on affordable terms;
- 4) the low level of virtual academic mobility, which has been slightly increased by the introduction of distance learning in the process of countering the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Virtual academic mobility is an effective tool for providing access to students and international projects and programs; along with this, it eliminates a number of limitations, in particular, regarding the number of participants involved in the educational process, attachment to a certain place and time, as well as regarding simultaneous study in several higher educational institutions;
- 5) the absence of a relationship between the level of education of specialists and their income, which turns the acquisition of higher education into a desire to receive a diploma as a formal confirmation of one's education, which requires an increase in the level of wages, especially for young specialists in order to stimulate them to positive changes.

Solving the issues outlined will make it possible to increase the indicators of academic mobility of students and will allow implementing their opportunities in the conditions of distance learning as effectively as possible.



#### 6. Conclusions

Therefore, the obtained results of the studies conducted on the problematic aspects of ensuring the academic mobility of students in the conditions of distance learning provide grounds for the conclusion that the processes of ensuring international educational integration require the activation of effective academic mobility of students. It has been established that the academic mobility of students significantly depends on the model of the national education system; in particular, the countries of the European Union are more attractive towards the implementation of educational projects than countries of the transitive type, including Ukraine, which establishes international educational cooperation within the framework of academic mobility, mainly with such countries as India, Morocco, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, China, Turkey and Egypt. The main problems of academic mobility of students have been identified, which include the low level of awareness of students regarding the possibilities of academic mobility, the lack of motivation to participate in projects and the relationship between the level of education and the income of specialists, and the low level of financial solvency of students. In the conditions of distance learning, the possibilities of academic mobility are significantly strengthened by innovative digital technologies that allow implementing the main principles, functions and tasks of academic mobility in a virtual environment and contribute to the avoidance of such limitations as the number of participants simultaneously participating in the educational process, time and place limitations of educational classes, etc.

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