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ACADEMIC MOBILITY OF UKRAINIAN STUDENTS: INTENTIONS, INVOLVEMENT AND OBSTACLES

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The article considers the concept of academic mobility, its role in the formation of a common educational area, conditions of activation of the academic mobility of students, as well as the main obstacles of its development. The results of international research project «Eurostudent» in Ukraine are presented. According to the survey results, experience of participation of Ukrainian students in programs of international academic mobility are presented; plans for further study abroad, as well as the main factors and constraints that do not allow this are discussed.

Keywords: international academic mobility, common educational area, Ukrainians students, educational programs of the European Union

У статті розглянуто поняття міжнародної академічної мобільності студентів, її роль у формуванні єдиного освітнього простору, причини, що сприяють активізації академічної мобільності серед студентів, а також основні перешкоди на шляху її розвитку. Міжнародну академічну мобільність визначено як інтеграційний процес у сфері освіти, який надає можливість студентам та іншим учасникам освітнього процесу брати участь у різноманітних навчальних та навчально-дослідницьких програмах, які проводяться в університетах та навчально-дослідницьких центрах в інших країнах світу. Наводяться результати нещодавно проведеного дослідження українських студентів, яке відбулося у межах міжнародного дослідницького проекту «Євростудент». Встановлено, що міжнародна академічна мобільність є не дуже поширеною серед українських студентів у першу чергу через брак коштів, організаційного досвіду та знання мови. Поїздки з метою навчання за кордон українські студенти здійснюють за власний рахунок або за рахунок батьків, закордонних фондів та організацій тощо. Ті студенти, які мають досвід міжнародної академічної мобільності, переваги надають країнам Європи та освітнім програмам Європейського Союзу.

Ключові слова: міжнародна академічна мобільність, єдиний освітній простір, українське студентство, освітні програми Європейського Союзу

В статье рассматривается понятие академической мобильности, ее роль в формировании единого образовательного пространства, причины, способствующие активизации академической мобильности среди студентов, а также основные препятствия на пути ее развития. Приводятся результаты исследования, проведенного в Украине в рамках международного исследовательского проекта «Евростудент» об опыте участия украинских студентов в программах международной академической мобильности, планы относительно дальнейшего обучения за рубежом, а также выделены основные факторы, препятствующие их реализации.

Ключевые слова: международная академическая мобильность, единое образовательное пространство, украинское студенчество, образовательные программы Европейского Союза

The current stage of development of the higher education system of Ukraine is characterized by the process of its integration into the common European educational area. According to many national experts, the

Bologna process has a significant impact on modernization and transformation of higher education and the development of our state. Integration of Ukraine into the Bologna process which has been carried out since 2005 will allow to improve the quality of education, will enable exchange at the stage of training between universities in different countries and will contribute to the growth of professional training, as well as will address the issue of recognition of Ukrainian diplomas abroad [1].

One of the important elements of this process is students' academic mobility. Mobility enriches national culture and increases educational and professional experience of its members. Academic mobility is a significant factor of systemic change through direct dissemination of experience. Growing importance of this factor was recognized by the adoption in 2001 of recommendations for increase of mobility for individual related to education and skills development by European Parliament and the Council of Europe.

Importance of academic mobility in European Union has been increasing since mid-80s, and nowadays it is one of the key statements of education development strategy for the period up to 2020. Through its mobility programs, the European Union supports exchange of innovations and expertise, contributes to creation of educational networks and mobility of people involved in research and educational activities [2; 4].

There are several definitions of academic mobility. Some experts in the field of international education under academic mobility understand limited in time period of student's study in a country where he is not a citizen. In this case mobility is finished when the student returns to his/her native country after completion of studies abroad. In this case, however, the term "academic mobility" does not reflect the process of migration from one country to another. According to other sources, academic mobility is an opportunity for students to define their educational trajectory, to choose subjects within the educational standards, courses and education in accordance with their aptitudes and aspirations [6; 8].

Important factors that make academic mobility interesting for students are reputation and status of universities; content of education programs; attractiveness of intellectual, cultural and political climate in the country of intended learning; certain easiness of access to higher education abroad; common language and religion of the host country; political stability and security; geographical proximity and presence (sometimes) of relatives and friends in the country of study. Except for this, among the factors that push young people to go to study abroad are: limited internal educational capacity in the country of origin; absence of some professions or their unavailability on the market; method of financing and the cost of education (especially for middle-class students); opportunities for part- and full-time employment while studying abroad; language of education; international qualifications reputation; status and prestige of education abroad; prestige of the host country and intercultural experience; enhance career opportunities and favorable economic impact on the labor market; immigration motivation and impact of immigration policy.

Academic mobility of students can take many forms: entering a university in another country to complete a full program and to get a degree; participation in short-term exchange programs; language programs developed by universities in partnership; programs of joint degrees or double degrees.

According to European experts, international student mobility in the last 30 years has increased significantly: from 0.6 million students in 1975 to 2.7 million in 2005. From 1995 the number of foreign students in Europe was doubled. It is projected that international student mobility in 2020 will reach 5.8 million people and 8 million by 2025 [5].

Academic mobility of students is a priority in the development strategy of modern higher education. Thus, increasing of the flow of all types of student mobility in many countries becomes the object of a state policy. It is important to note that different countries are unequally involved in the processes of academic mobility. In the scientific literature countries could be divided into donor countries and recipient countries – depending on their contribution to the international academic mobility. Recipient countries mainly receive mobile students from around the world, and the donor countries are those who send their students to study to other countries. Among donor countries, China should be mentioned first of all. Chinese students learn practically all over the world, their number reaches one million people, but no matter what country they have learned in, they support the interests of China. Except for this, students from South Korea and India and most of Arab and African countries could be mentioned. Among CIS countries, Russian Federation ranks among the recipient countries only at tenth place. This country actively engages not only representatives of Afro-Asian region, but also students from the former Soviet Union [1].

In Ukraine, academic mobility programs are being implemented from the end of 1990s causing very controversial feedbacks of the academic community. However, Ukraine is not involved into the number of universally recognized importing/receiving countries. Years of political and economic instability and low living standards make our country less attractive for students from other countries, and especially from Europe, Japan, USA, and Canada. In conditions when the best Ukrainian students would leave for study and training abroad,

Ukrainian universities are replenished by very poorly trained and motivated students from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, which poses serious challenges to the educational system of Ukraine and reduces the quality of learning.

Thus, modern higher education system in Ukraine should consider academic mobility as strategic objective of its international interests and, in this connection, to develop ways to convert education abroad into an integral component of higher within the concept of modernization of higher education, and to provide awareness of students about the content of education in the universities abroad; integration of study abroad with the education programs of higher education and university infrastructure; support of collaboration between universities, leading to obtaining joint degrees and other forms of automatic recognition [7].

Student mobility is one of the key topics in European higher education policy. Thus, there is a great interest in data on student mobility. Simultaneously, awareness of unequal chances of participation has risen, which is why also the interest for subjective and structural obstacles to mobility is increasing.

Let us consider the results of one of such surveys in order to identify how widespread are the intentions of Ukrainian students to study abroad are; which countries are most attractive for them and what are the main obstacles on the way to obtaining education abroad. This survey is a part of international research project «Eurostudent» which itself is a good example of international cooperation in the field of higher education.

«Eurostudent» is a network of researchers and data collectors, representatives of national ministries and other stakeholders who have joined forces to examine the social and economic conditions of student life in higher education systems in Europe. The start of «Eurostudent» can be traced back to the 1990s. In 2012, the fifth round of «Eurostudent» started with 27 participating countries from a broad geographical spectrum. The participants span from Norway in the north all the way to Malta in the south and from Portugal in the west to Armenia in the east. This means that the «Eurostudent» data set covers most of larger Europe [13].

The «Eurostudent» approach is based on the conviction that cross-country comparisons facilitate learning about strengths and weaknesses or simply idiosyncrasies of national higher education systems and – thereby – help countries to see their own higher education system in a new light. The «Eurostudent» data set uniquely covers all aspects of student life in European higher education. In the fourth round of «Eurostudent», more than 200,000 students were surveyed.

The main aim of the «Eurostudent» project is to collate comparable data on the social dimension of European higher education. It focuses on the socio-economic background and on the living conditions of students, but it also investigates temporary international mobility. In this, it differentiates the information by policy-relevant student characteristics such as social background, age, transition route into higher education and study intensity. The project strives to provide reliable and insightful cross-country comparisons. It does this through coupling a central coordination approach with a strong network of national partners in each participating country. In this way, an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the respective national frameworks in international comparison can be made. The primary users of the findings from «Eurostudent» are higher education policy-makers at national and European level, researchers in this field, managers of higher education institutions and students all over Europe.

Since 1990s there were four waves of survey conducted in more than thirty European countries. The fifth wave of the program was completed in 2014. Ukraine first joined this program in the fifth wave. In Ukraine, the study was coordinated by Social and Humanitarian Research Institute of V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University under the leadership of the rector of the university, doctor of sociological sciences, academician of NAS of Ukraine Professor Vil Bakirov and with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and Sociological Association of Ukraine. The survey in Ukraine took place between March and May 2014 and was conducted in 42 higher education institutions in thirteen regions of the country (Kiev, Lvov, Kharkov, Dnepropetrovsk, Odessa, Donetsk, Lutsk, Zhitomir, Lugansk, Poltava, Kherson, Chernovtsy, and Sumy). Students were surveyed using printed questionnaires in classrooms during or after classes. Total number of students who participated in the survey is 3696. The survey involved students of 1-5 courses of various disciplines. The proportions of students to be questioned in different areas in public and private universities, as well as the various departments were determined according to national statistics. Specific university and a group of students to be interviewed were selected randomly. The survey involved only full-time students.

Talking about their intentions to continue education, majority (61%) of Ukrainian student noticed that most likely they will continue education in Ukraine and around 6% are going to continue education abroad. The rest are not sure about their plans for future yet. Those students who plan to continue education abroad, when talking about the country where they would like to study in the future, most frequently mention Poland (15%), Germany (11%), USA (8%), Austria (7%), United Kingdom (7%), Australia (5%), France (4%), Russian Federation (3%), Canada (2%), China (2%), and Czech Republic (2%).

Розділ 3. Дослідження проблем освіти та молоді

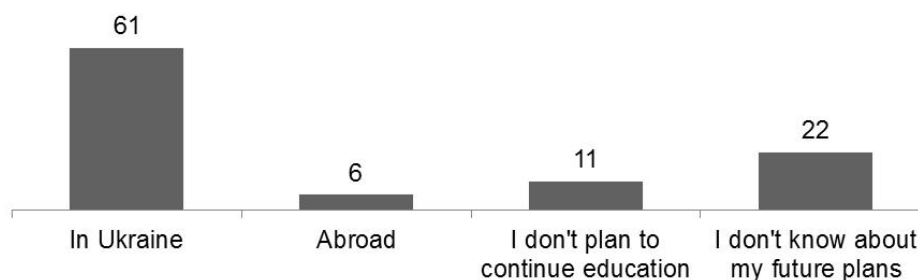


Figure 1. Answers distribution to the question: «Where do you plan to continue studying?», % (N=3696)

Table 1.

Answers distribution to the question: «Where do you plan to continue studying?», % in groups

	Classic university	Economic HEI	Technical, engineering	Pedagogical HEI	Medical HEI	Other HEI
In Ukraine	59	58	59	69	39	56
Abroad	7	4	4	4	17	6
I don't plan to continue education	9	15	13	7	14	12
I don't know about future plans	25	23	24	20	30	26
	N=911	N=473	N=942	N=239	N=244	N=492

One of the reasons why students are not too much intended to continue their education abroad might be lack of confidence in their level of knowledge and their expertise. For instance, when estimating their employment chances, Ukrainian students believe that highest their chances are at Ukrainian labor market (49%) while at international labor market – both among CIS countries and worldwide – they see much less possibilities to be employed.

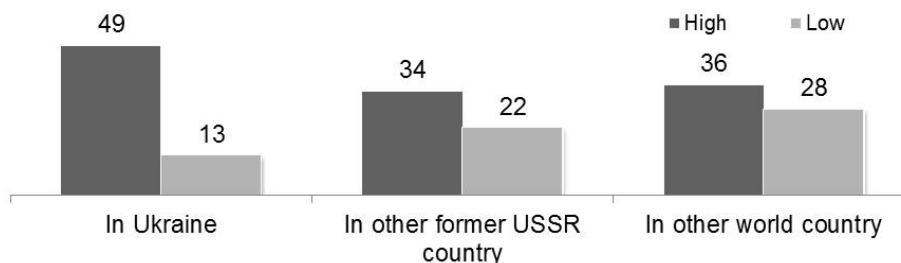


Figure 2. Answers distribution to the question: «How do you rate your chances on the labor market after graduating from your current study program?» (N=3696)

Table 2.

Answers distribution to the question: «How do you rate your chances on the labor market after graduating from your current study program?» («very high» + «high» in %), % in groups

	Classic university	Economic HEI	Technical, engineering	Pedagogical HEI	Medical HEI	Other HEI
In Ukraine	41	53	49	44	64	57
In other former USSR country	27	33	41	23	42	39
In other world country	34	34	42	22	25	36
	N=911	N=473	N=942	N=239	N=244	N=492

According to the survey results, involvement of Ukrainian students into academic mobility is very low: only 1-2% of students polled in different higher education institutions noted that they have been enrolled abroad as students of higher education. Students' intentions to continue education abroad the highest are among respondents in classical universities (37%) and pedagogical HEI (32%).

Table 3.

Answers distribution to the question: «Have you ever been enrolled abroad as a student in higher education?», %

	Classic university	Economic HEI	Technical, engineering	Pedagogical HEI	Medical HEI	Other HEI
Yes, I have	1	1	2	2	1	1
No, but I plan to go	37	24	25	32	25	30
No, and I do not plan to go	62	75	73	66	74	69
	N=911	N=473	N=942	N=239	N=244	N=492

Comparing with the other countries of the «EurostudentIV» network, we can note that the percentage of students that have already been enrolled abroad lies between 2% and 14%. Northern European countries have a relatively high percentage of enrolled students, which is highest in Finland, Norway and The Netherlands (14%). On the contrary, the majority of Eastern European countries have a relatively low percentage of enrolled students, with Romania at the upper end (5%) and Croatia on the lower (2%) [13].

As far as gender differences are concerned, in Europe women show a higher affinity towards enrolment abroad than men in almost all countries (except for Germany, France and Italy). For example in Estonia, 10% of all female students have already been mobile when the survey was conducted, but only 6% of all male students. In Latvia those differences are similar, as the percentage of enrolled students among women is almost 1.5 times higher than among men. In that sense, in most countries men are underrepresented among mobile students. In most countries, so-called non-traditional student groups are less likely to temporarily enroll abroad during their study career. These are students who study part-time (low study intensity), students from a lower social background or students with delayed transition into higher education [12]. Students who enrolled in higher education directly after completing secondary education have a higher percentage of enrolled students, whereas students with delayed transition into higher education have a lower affinity towards enrolment abroad. In most countries there also occur strong differences depending on the education background of students. Students from lower educational background often have a lower likelihood of spending a study period abroad. These differences range from almost zero in Germany to a sevenfold higher percentage of enrolled students of students with high education background in Romania and Slovenia. In many countries, these two characteristics correlate highly as the non-traditional track into tertiary education is more often followed by students from lower educated families [14; 15].

Ukrainian students who have not studied abroad yet, but are planning to do so, very often do not know how exactly to organize their education abroad and their trip (50%). Among those who have more concrete ideas quite popular are exchange programs of the European Union (20%) as well as other state or inter-state programs (12%). Nearly 16% of those students, who plan to study abroad in future, are going to organize it themselves – beyond any academic program.

According to the survey results, in Ukraine EU programs are more popular among students of classical universities (20%), medical HEI (20%) as well as technical and engineering HEI (24%). Students of economic (22%) and pedagogical HEIs (29%) are more intended to organize their education abroad individually beyond the framework of any exchange program.

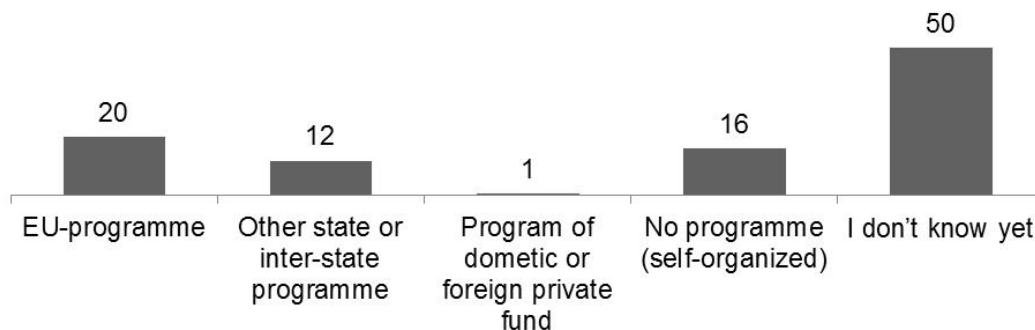


Figure 3. **Answers distribution to the question: «Within which of the following organizational frameworks do you plan to organize your temporary study abroad?» (N=1072)**

Розділ 3. Дослідження проблем освіти та молоді

All students, despite their intention to study abroad, were asked to estimate main obstacles that make it difficult for Ukrainian student to practice obtaining of education abroad. According to survey results, we can note that the main reason why students do not plan to study abroad is the additional financial burden which this education would cause for them (53%). Also nearly one third of the respondents noted that their language skills (33%) are not sufficient for studying in another country. Among the other important obstacles: organizational difficulties related to necessity to obtain a visa and to prepare all the other documents for this (32%). For nearly a quarter of respondents it is difficult to separate with their families and relatives (24%).

Mentioned obstacles could be divided into six dimensions of obstructions to enrolment abroad. Four groups of obstacles lie on separate dimensions, which are financial issues, personal reasons, problems regarding studies at home and insufficient language skills. The remaining two groups of obstacles – problems resulting from access barriers to the host country and organizational issues – point in the same direction and can therefore be seen as highly correlated. Denmark, Sweden and Norway as representatives of the Scandinavian countries, show highest values on the personal dimension, though Norwegian students tending to rate financial issues higher than other Nordic countries. In these countries financial or organizational issues are stated by a far smaller share of students than in other countries, mostly in Eastern and Southern Europe. Compared to other countries in the «Eurostudent» IV network, the conclusion thereof would be that in Northern Europe structural barriers to enrolment abroad are smaller. This goes along with a high enrolment rate in those countries. In relation to other countries, Croatian, Austrian and Swiss students report obstacles related to their studies more often than other obstacles. Those countries have a comparably high share of students that passed an internship abroad (which was not subject to the questions on obstacles) [13].

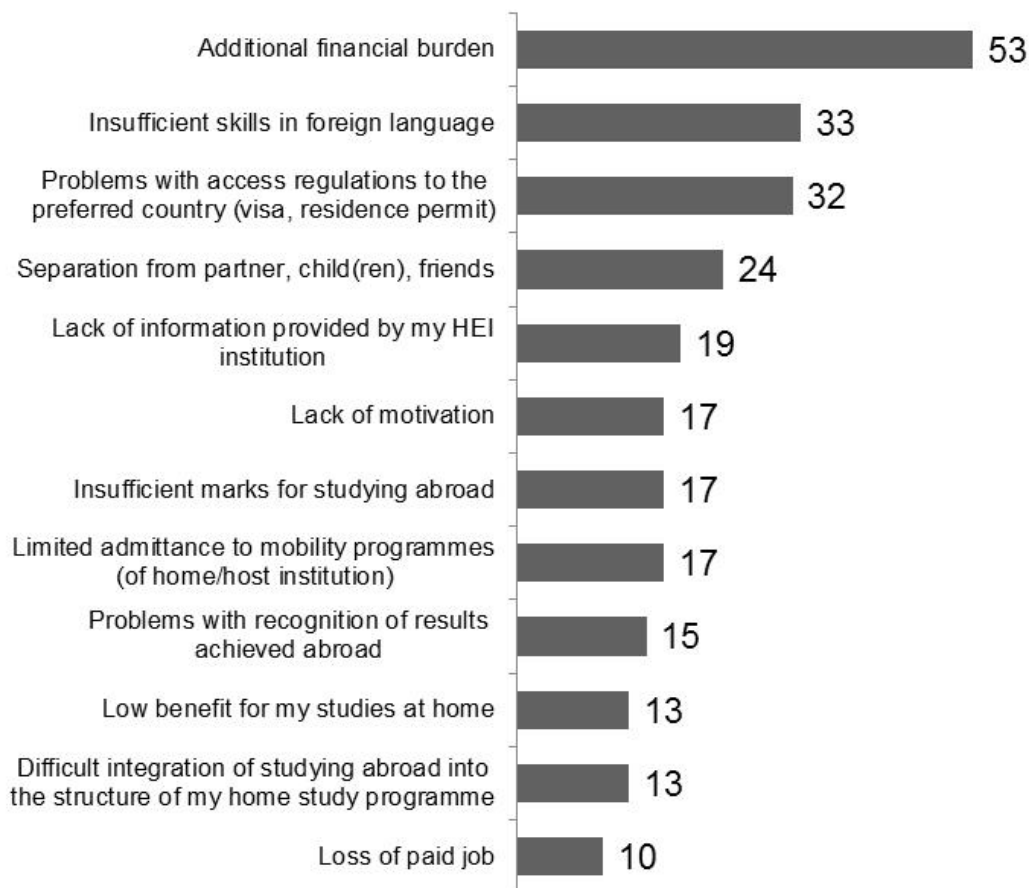


Figure 3. Answers distribution to the question: «To what extent are or were the following aspects an obstacle for studying abroad to you?» («big obstacle» + «rather big obstacle» in %) (N=3696)

Another trend observed is that structural or organizational problems as well as too little language skills or financial obstructions are reported more often in Eastern and Southern European countries. In Spain and Portugal,

but also Slovenia, limited access to mobility programs is stated as an obstacle by about 1/3 of non-mobile students, which is the highest share among «Eurostudent» IV countries. Spanish and Slovakian students remarkably frequently report insufficient language skills as hindering for their enrolment plans. In Estonia and Slovenia about ¾ of non-mobile students assess the additional financial burden of an enrolment period abroad to be an obstacle to mobility. The conclusion that can thus be drawn is that students in those regions are likely to face structural barriers to mobility that lie within the education system, as well as financial obstructions. This interpretation is also supported by a relatively low enrolment quota especially in Eastern European countries [16].

Coming to conclusions, we can note that despite international academic mobility being an important feature of development of higher education in the world nowadays, level of involvement of Ukrainian students into this process is relatively low. Comparing to other European countries, majority of Ukrainian students do not understand the benefits of international academic mobility and do not feel ready to practice it. Lack of financial resources as well as lack of motivation and language skills are main reasons that support such opinion.

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