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Assessing the Impact of Erasmus Teaching Mobility on Internationalization in Portuguese Higher Education: A Case Study

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Abstract

This article explores the significance of Erasmus teaching mobility within the Portuguese higher education landscape, particularly within the framework of internationalization. Scholarly research has revealed that Portuguese universities recognize the crucial role of internationalization in ensuring long-term sustainability and prioritize English proficiency, along with other languages, within language education policies. Despite this prioritization, a notable gap remains in the implementation of these policies, especially regarding academic and intercultural interactions. Within this context, this article describes and discusses an investigation on the usefulness of an academic writing short course at the University Nova School of Science and Technology in Lisbon, Portugal, conducted under the Life Long Learning Program (LLP)/Socrates/Erasmus "teaching staff mobility (TSM)" activities. Feedback from 11 Master's students enrolled in the department of Applied Social Sciences revealed high satisfaction with the course content, with preferences for specific academic writing skills including understanding the nature of literature reviews, formulating research questions, structuring arguments, and critically evaluating them. Suggestions for improvement include restructuring the course into shorter modules for better comprehension and simplifying course materials to enhance learning experiences. Students' comments also underscored the influence of Portuguese cultural norms on learning. Initial implications highlight the need to blend pedagogical flexibility with cultural responsiveness in educational strategies, facilitating the necessary intersectionality to bridge language policies with internationalization efforts. Erasmus teaching mobility emerges as a key facilitator in achieving this blend.

Keywords: Academic writing, Erasmus teaching mobility, Internationalization, Higher Education, Language Policy



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1. Introduction

In the evolving landscape of higher education, the internationalization of universities has become a critical priority, driven by the increasing need for institutions to expand their global influence and collaboration. Erasmus, a cornerstone of European academic mobility, is widely regarded as a significant force in fostering internationalization across European universities (Beerkens & Vossensteyn, 2011). In the context of Portuguese Higher Education (HE), Coelho and Ribeiro (2018) examined the strategic plans of 16 polytechnic institutes and 14 universities, uncovering a strong institutional focus on internationalization, particularly through partnerships, mobility for both students and faculty, and offering English-taught programs. However, these initiatives often lacked alignment with national growth strategies, signaling the need for more cohesive and targeted efforts.

Further research highlights the role of foreign language (FL) education as essential to internationalization. Ceia and Hurst (2017) examined foreign language teaching policies in Portuguese higher education institutions and identified a significant gap. Despite the presence of qualified teaching staff, a cohesive strategy for enhancing students' proficiency in intercultural contexts was lacking. This underlined the necessity for a collaborative, multidisciplinary effort to elevate language education as a strategic pillar of internationalization in Portugal.

Carvalho et al. (2021) extended this discussion by investigating the policies Portuguese universities employ to attract international academics, noting varying strategies across institutions and a general lack of clear, cohesive approaches due to economic constraints. Their findings emphasized that while newer universities tended to prioritize global positioning, more established ones focused on fostering intercultural exchange, revealing inconsistencies in international staff recruitment strategies. Moreover, research by Gogadze et al. (2024) examined the participation of Portuguese higher education institutions in European University Alliances (EUAs) under the Erasmus+ programme, emphasizing the importance of these alliances in fostering international collaboration and mobility. However, the study indicated that improvements were still necessary, especially in expanding foreign language programs.

These studies collectively reveal gaps in the literature, particularly concerning the integration of foreign language teaching and staff mobility within internationalization strategies. While the significance of international collaboration is well-established, the specific impact of Erasmus teaching mobility on academic environments in Portuguese HEIs, particularly in the realm of language education, remains underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the role of Erasmus teaching mobility in enriching Portuguese universities' academic and internationalization efforts.

This paper focuses on the strategic incorporation of incoming Erasmus language teaching staff within Portuguese universities, with a specific emphasis on the impact of these exchanges on both academic enrichment and international collaboration. To address this, a survey was conducted at the Department of Applied Sciences at the University of Nova School of Science and Technology in Lisbon, Portugal, evaluating postgraduate students' perceptions of an Erasmus short academic writing course. The research questions guiding this study are: (1) How satisfied are Portuguese postgraduate students with the quality and utility of the Erasmus academic writing course? (2) What is the impact of this course on the internationalization initiatives within the department?

The paper begins with a literature review on foreign language education's influence on internationalization in Portuguese HE. It then provides an overview of Erasmus, its scope, and its contributions to HE internationalization, before presenting the study's methodology, analysis, and discussion of findings. Finally, the paper concludes by drawing implications from the results and offering recommendations for enhancing internationalization through Erasmus teaching mobility.

2. Literature Review

This literature review explores the intersection of foreign language education and internationalization within Portuguese higher education, beginning with the discussion of language proficiency and internationalization goals. This section highlights the critical role of multilingual skills in fostering global citizenship and aligning with national and EU educational objectives. Next, it examines the policy framework, institutional adaptation, and strategic communication necessary for implementing effective language education strategies that support the internationalization agenda. The review then emphasizes the importance of adopting holistic approaches to internationalization, identifying gaps in language education policy, and advocating for integrated strategies that enhance inclusivity and collaboration in academic environments. Finally, it delves into the Erasmus program, outlining its evolution and categorizing research into macro, micro, and meso-level analyses to elucidate its impact on higher education institutions.

2.1. Language Proficiency and Internationalization Goals

The discourse surrounding foreign language education's impact on internationalization within Portuguese higher education institutions reveals a profound interconnection between language proficiency and the broader objectives of internationalization. Moreira (2020) underscores the European Union's advocacy for multilingualism and linguistic diversity in higher education. This advocacy emphasizes the significance of English proficiency, along with a second foreign language and intercultural competences, as essential components for fostering global citizenship and workforce readiness. The focus on language skills aligns seamlessly with Portugal's national guidelines for internationalization, which prioritize collaboration, mobility, and the internationalization of curricula, particularly through the expansion of English-taught courses and programs. Research consistently highlights that multilingual proficiency, especially in English, is crucial for Portugal's global economic integration, positioning language education as a pivotal element in facilitating internationalization efforts.

2.2. Policy Framework, Institutional Adaptation, and Strategic Communication

Portugal's response to the EU's internationalization agenda involves significant legal reforms and policy initiatives designed to enhance the attractiveness and autonomy of its higher education institutions. As noted by Zhang, Zheng, and Zhou (2023), reforms initiated in 2007, followed by additional policies in 2014 and 2016, underscore a commitment to comprehensive internationalization. The adaptation to the Bologna Process is pivotal, necessitating coordinated efforts across various sectors within higher education, including investments in quality assurance and resource allocation.

As these institutions navigate the Bologna Process, language education becomes integral to their internationalization strategies. Proficiency in multiple languages enables effective communication, collaboration, and engagement in global academic networks, which are essential for fostering international partnerships and collaborative research initiatives. This dual emphasis on legal and educational frameworks illustrates the complexity of internationalization efforts, highlighting that successful implementation requires both institutional commitment and infrastructural support.

Furthermore, Ferreira (2019) highlights the critical role of strategic communication within the internationalization processes of Portuguese public universities. Effective communication serves as a vehicle for building relationships among stakeholders, enhancing institutional reputation, and optimizing internationalization efforts. This implies that successful engagement with diverse stakeholders necessitates proficiency in multiple languages, thereby reinforcing the importance of language education.

2.3. Holistic Approaches to Internationalization and Gaps in Language Education Policy

The importance of adopting holistic approaches to internationalization is emphasized in the work of Lourenco, Andrade, and Byram (2020). Their study, focused on a Portuguese public university, explores the diverse perspectives of stakeholders on internationalization and highlights the need for institution-wide strategies. These strategies should go beyond isolated efforts, aiming for inclusivity and long-term sustainability. The findings underscore the importance of integrated approaches to ensure that internationalization efforts are comprehensive and impactful across the institution.

Guerreiro and Barros (2018) add depth to this discussion through interviews with leaders of Portuguese Higher Education Institutions. Their research highlights the varied dimensions of internationalization, including targeted programmes for international students, enhanced mobility initiatives, and foreign language courses. These components underscore the critical role of language proficiency, particularly in English, in creating globally engaged and inclusive academic environments.

Pinto and Araújo e Sá (2019) further emphasize the connection between language education policies and internationalization. Their analysis of Portuguese public universities identifies a gap between the recognized importance of language education and the existing practices, which often prioritize English. While this focus on English is seen as essential for global competitiveness and fostering international collaboration, there is also a need for leadership to support multilingualism in ways that complement English proficiency, without detracting from its central role in internationalization efforts.

In summary, language education emerges as a fundamental pillar underpinning the internationalization endeavors of Portuguese higher education institutions. Addressing the identified gaps in language education and aligning these efforts with institutional objectives is essential for enhancing global competitiveness and fostering an inclusive, diverse learning environment. Proactive efforts to seamlessly integrate internationalization within higher education institutions are imperative for long-term success in the global educational arena. By critically engaging with these findings, stakeholders can gain valuable insights into the complexities of language education's role in internationalization and devise strategies that ensure equitable benefits for all participants in the academic community.

2.4. Evolution and Research Perspectives of the Erasmus Programme

Kafarski and Kazak (2022) trace the expansion of the Erasmus programme from its origins as a student exchange initiative to the more comprehensive Erasmus+ framework. While the programme's evolution is a testament to the EU's commitment to fostering mobility and collaboration, its broader significance lies in its role as a driver of European identity and solidarity. However, this also presents challenges: as Erasmus+ expands, its focus on accessibility for participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds must be critically evaluated. There is a risk that, despite its broad reach, the program may still primarily benefit those already equipped to engage in international experiences, leaving others behind.

Cairns and Krzaklewska (2019) categorize Erasmus research into three main approaches—macro-level, micro-level, and meso-level analysis—each offering unique insights into the programme's functioning and impact on higher education. Macro-Level Analysis focuses on quantifying mobility levels and cross-national participation trends. Typically funded by policymaking agencies, this approach aims to evaluate program outcomes using descriptive statistics. However, studies conducted by entities such as the European Commission and host universities may lack critical perspectives, as these organizations can be hesitant to acknowledge their shortcomings. In contrast, Micro-Level Analysis emphasizes students' personal experiences during their mobility encounters. While these studies delve into individual interests and narratives, researchers often shift their focus after the study concludes, leading policymakers to prioritize macro-level findings. This can result in a neglect of nuanced insights derived from students'

experiences, despite potential concerns about the robustness of sample sizes and analytical quality. Finally, Meso-Level Analysis examines the institutional management of Erasmus exchanges. It highlights the roles of educational institutions and civil society agencies in implementing initiatives, allowing researchers to assess the programme's effectiveness at the organizational level. This approach also explores the impact of Erasmus on broader institutional internationalization efforts. Together, these three analytical perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of the Erasmus program's complexities. By integrating macro, micro, and meso-level insights, researchers can more fully grasp the implications of Erasmus for higher education institutions and their stakeholders.

Several research studies have explored the Erasmus program through macro, micro, and meso-level perspectives, offering valuable insights into its broader impacts on educational systems, individual participants, and institutional dynamics. Vukovic et al. (2017) provide a macro-level analysis of Erasmus utilization, revealing that many HEIs view the programme as an administrative framework rather than an active tool for internationalization. This broader trend raises significant concerns about the missed potential of Erasmus to enhance academic and research quality. The study implies that without strategic engagement from HEIs, the full benefits of Erasmus will not be realized. A critical gap emerges: institutions need to shift from viewing Erasmus as a mere exchange platform to embracing it as a catalyst for institutional growth and internationalization.

Serpa et al. (2020) echo this sentiment, highlighting the institutional benefits of mobility through Erasmus. Their research emphasizes the importance of evaluating the impact of mobility programmes on internationalization strategies. The broader significance of this study is its call for more structured evaluation mechanisms within HEIs, which would enable them to assess the long-term contributions of Erasmus to their institutional goals. Without such evaluations, the transformative potential of Erasmus may remain underutilized, limiting its ability to drive meaningful change in higher education.

Katsara (2016) and Katsara (2022) provide micro-level insights into the personal experiences of students and faculty involved in Erasmus mobility. While these studies demonstrate the positive impact of teaching mobility on curriculum development and student learning, they also reveal broader issues related to the accessibility and effectiveness of such programs. For instance, Anonymous (2022) highlights student preferences for more focused and culturally responsive teaching approaches, suggesting that current mobility programs may not fully address the diverse needs of participants. The broader implication is that Erasmus mobility programs must adapt to the specific cultural and educational contexts of each host institution to be truly effective.

At the meso-level, Vlad (2021) and Daadaoui and Ghanimi (2023) focus on the organizational impact of Erasmus mobility, particularly in terms of professional development and institutional reform. Vlad's study demonstrates the significant advancements in teaching practices and curriculum development resulting from Erasmus participation, with 43% of respondents reporting tangible improvements in their institutions. However, the broader significance of these findings suggests that more comprehensive support structures are needed to maximize the program's impact on organizational change. Without institutional frameworks to support and evaluate these developments, the long-term benefits of Erasmus may be limited.

Daadaoui and Ghanimi's (2023) research on Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) projects in Morocco highlights the broader institutional reforms driven by Erasmus initiatives. Their study reveals how Erasmus has catalyzed changes in governance, digital integration, and pedagogical practices in Moroccan HEIs. The broader implication is that Erasmus can serve as a powerful tool for capacity building, not just within Europe but globally, if properly supported by institutional leadership and national policies.

To conclude, the Erasmus program functions as a catalyst for educational transformation across multiple levels of higher education. It not only fosters international collaboration and promotes pedagogical innovation but also enhances institutional capacity to engage effectively in global education. The diverse research approaches highlighted in the literature demonstrate that while significant progress has been

made, challenges remain, particularly in terms of inclusivity, access, and the integration of multilingual education. By critically engaging with these findings, policymakers and stakeholders can leverage the full potential of the Erasmus program to drive positive change within higher education systems globally. Emphasizing the need for tailored strategies that accommodate diverse linguistic and cultural contexts will be crucial for maximizing the program's impact and ensuring equitable benefits for all participants. Ultimately, the ongoing evaluation and adaptation of both language education and mobility programs are essential for achieving a more inclusive and dynamic international higher education landscape.

3. Research Method

3.1 Setting: The Case of University of Nova School of Science and Technology

The Erasmus section of NOVA's website provides clear evidence of its extensive involvement and commitment to the Erasmus program. Specifically, NOVA's commitment to internationalization is evident in its comprehensive internationalization strategy. Established in 1973, NOVA saw significant development post the Carnation Revolution as numerous Portuguese professors, previously engaged in academic pursuits abroad, returned to Portugal. This influx, alongside collaborations with foreign colleagues, laid the foundation for NOVA's robust international profile, an inherent aspect of its identity.

NOVA has actively pursued internationalization, particularly since 2004, by engaging in various international mobility programs, independently or in partnership with other institutions. Currently, NOVA hosts 199 foreign teachers and researchers, with 3,408 foreign students enrolled in degree programs and 1,128 in mobility programs. In addition, numerous programs at the university incorporate an international dimension, enabling participants to immerse themselves in different cultures, understand various levels of development, and acquire insights into best practices from diverse regions and countries.

Over the previous multi-annual period (2014-2020), NOVA actively engaged in 83 Erasmus projects, serving as coordinator in 27 instances and as a partner beneficiary in 56 projects. This extensive involvement, with a direct responsibility exceeding 14 million euros, underscores the substantial impact of Erasmus on NOVA's educational initiatives. Having been awarded the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027, NOVA University Lisbon remains steadfast in its commitment to the fundamental goals of the Erasmus program as it moves forward to 2027. This includes placing emphasis on social inclusion, ecological and digital transitions, and the promotion of citizenship and European values.

Recently, at the Erasmus+ Gala on April 9, 2024, NOVA University Lisbon received the esteemed title of Best University in the Mobility in Higher Education category from the National Agency Erasmus+ Education and Training. This prestigious recognition highlights the collaborative efforts of NOVA's international mobility management teams across all academic units and partner institutions, emphasizing the university's dedication to fostering international cooperation and educational exchange.

An example of NOVA's internationalization efforts is illustrated by a bilateral agreement between NOVA School of Science and Technology and the University of Patras, Greece. In September 2022, the author lectured for four hours at the University Nova School of Science and Technology in Lisbon, Portugal, as per the bilateral agreement with the University of Patras, Greece, under the Life Long Learning Programme (LLP)/Socrates/Erasmus "teaching staff mobility (TSM)" activities. Her lectures were attended by 11 postgraduate Portuguese students. The 4-hour training course was a training course primarily focused on advanced general academic writing skills not taught at the postgraduate master's programme of applied sciences at the University of Nova School of Science and Technology in Lisbon, Portugal. The department offers no courses in academic English while one of the admission requirements stipulates proficiency in both spoken and written Portuguese, as well as a mastery of fundamental logical reasoning principles, as outlined in decree-law 79/2014, article 17, nº1. According to Cabral (2020: 78-79), this poli-

cy reflects Portuguese ministry guidelines, which stipulates that neither the Portuguese nor the English basic and secondary school curricula incorporate a dedicated subject solely focused on writing. While writing is acknowledged as an important skill in both curricula, they emphasize that the acquisition of writing skills should be integrated into various language tasks performed by students in the classroom. The overarching goal is to enhance students' overall communicative competence through practical application within language learning activities. In addition, in higher education, academic writing is not a widespread subject in undergraduate programs, with specific courses introduced only at the graduate level. Some universities offer dedicated academic writing courses at the master's level. However, academic writing is often integrated into research methods courses rather than being taught as a standalone subject. Assessment requirements in higher education typically include short essays, participation in scientific papers, and, for PhD programs, reports and research proposals. Despite the importance of academic writing in higher education, students' writing is typically guided by professors or supervisors. This practice remains common across Portuguese higher education institutions.

3.2 Structure of the Course

The course aimed to train students on (a) how to craft literature reviews; (b) how to develop their critical analysis skills; and (c) how to cultivate effective communication and scholarly integrity. The syllabus of the short course encompassed academic writing, with an emphasis on source selection, viewpoint organization, and literature review composition. Teaching materials, tailored for B2–C2 proficiency levels, were curated from diverse academic sources. Relevant handouts were distributed to students on the day the course was delivered. The course structure is delineated in Appendix 1. PowerPoint presentations offered in-depth explanations of each concept, accompanied by illustrative examples. Following the presentation of concept, students were grouped together to complete short tasks within designated time frames.

3.3 Instrument and Data Collection

At the conclusion of the short course, students were invited to complete a satisfaction questionnaire to provide feedback on its effectiveness. They were briefed on ethical considerations, such as confidentiality and anonymity, and informed that the survey's main purpose was to improve future Erasmus courses by addressing student needs more effectively. Students were asked to sign their reflection journals below the ethical statement to confirm their understanding of the confidentiality and anonymity provisions. Additionally, they were informed of their right to access, amend, withdraw, or delete their data at any time without any repercussions. It was clearly communicated that the feedback collected would be used solely to improve future courses, and that all questionnaires would be securely disposed of after one year.

The questionnaire consisted of eight questions. The first two inquired about students' gender and English proficiency. Questions 3, 4, and 5 evaluated specific aspects of the course. Finally, questions 6, 7, and 8 allowed students to provide open-ended feedback on their favorite and least favorite aspects of the course, along with suggestions for improvement. A five-point Likert scale was used, with the following response options: very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied.

The participant selection followed a purposive or judgmental sampling method, as outlined by Maxwell (1996). This approach deliberately selects individuals who can provide in-depth information relevant to the research context. In this case, the sample consisted of 11 Portuguese postgraduate students from the Department of Applied Sciences who participated in the Erasmus academic writing course. Although the sample size may seem small, it was appropriate for gathering detailed qualitative insights from a specific and relevant group of participants. In the context of small, specialized courses—such as the Erasmus postgraduate academic writing course—the sample size is justifiable, as it reflects the actual enrollment

numbers typical in such programs. As the goal was to inform the redesign of the Erasmus syllabus tailored to these students' unique needs, focusing on this targeted cohort allowed for richer, context-specific data that may not have been captured with a broader sample.

3.4 Data Analysis

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to examine the experiences of Portuguese students, employing descriptive statistics for quantitative analysis (Rosenfeld, Edwards, & Thomas, 1995). A distinct feature was integrating open-ended questions to supplement quantitative results, in accordance with the concept of 'complementarity' in research aiming at elaborating, enhancing, illustrating, or clarifying findings from one method using results from another method. (Greene et al., 1989, as cited in Bryman, 2006).

In light of the research objective focused on exploring the impact of teaching mobility on internationalization efforts, content analysis was conducted using a directed approach. This method aims to validate or expand upon existing theoretical frameworks or theories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Leveraging established theory or previous research, key concepts or variables are initially identified as coding categories (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999, as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). In this study, Hofstede's (1986) cultural dimensions were employed as the initial framework to examine Portuguese students' comments regarding their learning experiences during the Erasmus academic writing course. These comments were carefully read and categorized according to predetermined coding categories derived from Hofstede's (1986) cultural dimensions. This directed approach provides a structured framework suited for the systematic exploration of specific aspects, ensuring consistency, efficiency, and transparency in data analysis. By utilizing established theory such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the study achieves a focused examination of predetermined concepts, facilitating a clearer interpretation of findings within a broader theoretical context

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative analysis

A 100% response rate underscores strong engagement from all 11 participants who completed the questionnaire. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with slightly more female participants (54.44% compared to 45.44%). The English proficiency levels of most students ranged between B2 (54.54%) and C2 (36.36%).

Impressively, the majority of participants (72.72%) expressed high satisfaction with the short course overall. Specifically, a significant proportion of students found various aspects of the presentation, including relevance, usefulness, and quality, to be very satisfying. Moreover, a notable percentage found both the visuals and handouts provided to be satisfying. This positive feedback underlines the effectiveness and value of the course in meeting the students' needs and expectations.

Moreover, feedback from students indicates a generally positive reception of the course materials, with a majority finding it much too detailed (54.54%) as shown in table 5. The most favored aspects of the course as show in table 6 include understanding the fundamentals of literature reviews (72.72%), the importance of research questions and scoping (63.63%), the components of constructing and evaluating arguments (63.63%), and how to develop claims and build evidence (54.54%). However, as shown in table 7 there are areas, such as dangers in argument development (72.72%), paraphrasing and summarizing (45.45%), and aspects of plagiarism and referencing, (36.36%) where students showed less interest. This feedback implies that additional support or clarification may be beneficial to enhance student engagement and comprehension.

Table 1 Gender

Gender	%
Female	54.54
Male	45.44

Table 2 Level of English

Level of English	%
A1	0
A2	0
B1	9.09
B2	54.54
C1	0
C2	36.36

Table 3 Overall evaluation

Overall evaluation	%
Very satisfied	72.72
Satisfied	27.27
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	0
Dissatisfied	0
Very dissatisfied	0

Table 4 Aspects of the presentation

Aspects of the presentation	Very satisfied %	Satisfied %	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied %	Dissatisfied %	Very dissatisfied %
Course Topic	81.81	18.18	0	0	0
Relevance of the information	81.81	18.18			
Usefulness of information	90.90	9.09	0	0	0
Quality of the presentation	72.72	18.18	9.09	0	0
Visual Aids	45.45	36.36	18.18	0	0
Handouts	54.54	36.36	9.09	0	0

Table 5 Detail in the presentation

Detail in the presentation	%
Much too detailed	54.54
Somewhat detailed	0
Just right	45.45

Detail in the presentation	%
Somewhat easy	0
Much too easy	0

Table 6 *Favourite part*

Components of the course	Favourite part %
What is literature review/What should be included	72.72
How do I review publications and what message should the literature review contain	45.45
Importance of research questions/scoping	63.63
Paraphrasing and Summarizing	36.36
Components of an argument, counter argument and evaluating an argument	63.63
Dangers in developing an argument	36.36
Claims and building evidence	54.54
Plagiarism and reference	36.36

Table 7 *Least favourite part*

Components of the course	Favourite part %
What is literature review/What should be included	9.09
How do I review publications and what message should the literature review contain	9.09
Importance of research questions/scoping	9.09
Paraphrasing and summarizing	45.45
Components of an argument, counter argument and evaluating an argument	9.09
Dangers in developing an argument	72.72
Claims and building evidence	9.09
Plagiarism and reference	36.36

The results of the Erasmus course survey, as presented in Tables 6 and 7, align closely with existing literature on academic writing challenges faced by graduate students, while also revealing some nuanced divergences.

First, the high preference for topics such as literature review construction (72.72%), research questions and scoping (63.63%), and building arguments (63.63%) aligns with earlier research by Xiao (2024), who noted that Chinese postgraduate students commonly struggle with structuring their research papers and ensuring logical flow. The participants' positive response to these components suggests that these areas remain significant challenges, and that targeted instruction in these topics is both necessary and appreciated. Similarly, Al Mahmud and ur Rahman (2023) emphasized the difficulty Saudi postgraduate students face in developing coherent research arguments, which corresponds to the Portuguese students' high appreciation for guidance on constructing arguments and evaluating claims (63.63%).

However, there are divergences when considering the least favorite aspects of the course. For example, 72.72% of students rated «dangers in developing an argument» as their least favorite topic. This contrasts with the high interest in learning about argument structure, possibly suggesting that students find the topic challenging or difficult to grasp, which aligns with findings from Gupta et al. (2022). Their study highlighted the ongoing need for dissertation-specific writing support, which may explain why some complex writing topics, such as argument development, are met with lower enthusiasm, despite their importance.

Another divergence lies in the area of paraphrasing and summarizing, with 45.45% marking it as their least favorite part of the course. While this could indicate a frustration with the repetitive nature of these skills or a perception of them as basic, it contrasts with prior findings that highlight these as crucial, yet often underdeveloped, skills among international doctoral students (Gupta et al., op.cit).

In sum, the current survey results both affirm the known difficulties faced by graduate students in academic writing and point toward areas where further refinement in teaching methods may be needed. The negative reactions to certain topics suggest that while students recognize the value of academic writing skills, more engaging or tailored instructional approaches may be necessary to effectively address complex writing tasks.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

The students' diverse comments in the open-ended responses offer a detailed and insightful picture of Portugal's cultural context. By examining these reflections through the lens of Hofstede's (1986) cultural dimensions, we can better understand the interplay between culture and the students' academic experiences during their Erasmus exchange. The students' responses, although varied in wording, often align with one another, highlighting common themes related to the learning environment and cultural dynamics. To avoid repetition, only a selection of these comments is presented.

4.2.1. Power Distance

Hofstede's power distance dimension refers to the degree of inequality that exists—and is accepted—among people with and without power. Portugal is characterized by a moderate power distance, indicating that while hierarchical structures are acknowledged, there is also some comfort in challenging authority. Students expressed appreciation for the course content while requesting additional specialized courses. For example, comments such as "This course was very useful. I learned a lot," "Unfortunately, we don't have a dedicated course on writing academic literature reviews for theses, which would have been very helpful" paired with requests for dedicated courses on topics like academic literature reviews, demonstrate a willingness to voice their educational needs. This illustrates that students are empowered to engage with their instructors despite existing hierarchies.

Educators can leverage this aspect by fostering an environment that encourages open communication, enabling students to express their needs and preferences more freely. Creating opportunities for student feedback can enhance the learning experience and strengthen the teacher-student relationship.

4.2.2. Collectivism

Hofstede's collectivism emphasizes group cohesion and interdependence over individual achievements. Portugal scores high on this dimension, reflecting a cultural preference for collective relationships. Students highlighted the benefits of collaborative learning, with one stating, "Collaborating with fellow students proved advantageous as it enabled me to seek their interpretations and collectively work on completing tasks." Another student noted, "Partnering up with classmates accelerated our progress,

fostering dynamic collaboration and swift task completion.” These comments pinpoint the value placed on teamwork and shared knowledge in their educational experiences.

To align educational practices with this collectivist tendency, instructors should incorporate cooperative learning strategies that promote group work and peer interaction. Such practices resonate with the cultural values of Portuguese students and enhance overall learning outcomes by fostering a sense of community.

4.2.3. Masculinity and Femininity

In Hofstede’s framework, masculinity refers to cultures that emphasize achievement, assertiveness, and material success, while femininity values nurturing, care, and quality of life. Portugal exhibits moderate levels of both masculinity and femininity. Students appreciated clear examples and assertive instruction—traits associated with masculinity—while also calling for more inclusive and accessible teaching materials. For instance, one student remarked, “The course provided clear examples, which really helped me grasp the concept of literature reviews.” However, another student pointed out, “There was a lot of information on each slide. It would be better to reduce information for visual clarity.” Additionally, another comment stated, “While the course content was informative, I found the dense slides challenging. Simplifying the layout could help ensure that all students can understand the material.”

These responses highlight a nuanced interplay between a preference for assertiveness in teaching and a desire for inclusiveness and clarity in presentation. Educators should strive to balance assertive, content-driven instruction with inclusive, empathetic teaching practices. By simplifying complex materials and ensuring clarity, educators can address diverse student needs and create a welcoming learning environment.

4.2.4. Uncertainty Avoidance

Portugal’s very high uncertainty avoidance score indicates a cultural inclination to avoid ambiguity and seek guidance. This tendency is evident in students’ feedback, where they express difficulty in grasping certain concepts and a strong preference for structured support. One student noted, “Understanding the nature of literature reviews was difficult, and I would appreciate more specific examples to aid my comprehension.” This comment illustrates a clear need for explicit guidance to alleviate their uncertainty in academic tasks.

Additionally, another student commented, “This course was very useful since there is an abundance of misleading information online regarding how to manage information when writing a thesis.” This highlights the significance of reliable guidance in navigating the overwhelming and often contradictory information available, underlining the value of a structured learning environment that helps clarify complex concepts.

However, some students also indicated a desire for flexibility in their learning resources. One student stated, “Having electronic handouts alongside lectures could prove incredibly helpful. This format provides me with the flexibility to review materials at my own pace, enhancing the convenience and effectiveness of my learning experience in class.” This feedback suggests that while students appreciate structured support, they also value opportunities for individual initiative and autonomy in their learning process.

These insights reflect a dual preference for both clear guidance and flexibility, highlighting how students navigate uncertainty within their educational context. To better support student learning, educators should consider offering a variety of instructional methods and resources, enabling students to choose options that align with their individual preferences and learning styles. This balanced approach can foster both structure and autonomy, helping students to take ownership of their educational experiences.

4.2.5. Short-term Orientation

The short-term orientation dimension focuses on immediate results and practical applications. Students' feedback often emphasized acquiring specific skills rather than long-term strategies. For instance, one student commented, "Before, I was unsure how to prepare a strategy and organization for a literature review. Now, I understand how to identify relevant authors and data to make meaningful contributions." Another expressed, "I want to take more hours of academic writing classes because there were interesting points discussed that I would like to explore further." These comments indicate a preference for practical, short-term objectives rather than a strategic long-term academic vision.

Educators should design curricula that prioritize immediate skill development while also encouraging students to consider the long-term implications of their learning. Linking short-term learning goals with broader academic objectives can help students appreciate the relevance of their studies, fostering a more holistic educational experience.

In essence, the insights gathered from this study clearly indicate the necessity for culturally responsive teaching practices that acknowledge and respect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of students. This aligns with Gay's (2018, p. 36) theory, which dictates that culturally responsive teaching refers to the practice of incorporating the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make their learning experiences more relevant and effective. Additionally, Gay (ibid., p. 42) asserts that culturally responsive teaching sets academic success as an essential requirement for all students and makes it an achievable objective. Based on the results of this study, ERASMUS teaching mobility appears to facilitate a convergence, effectively bridging language policies with efforts towards internationalization, thereby accentuating the role of culturally responsive teaching within ERASMUS contexts. By adapting educational approaches to reflect the cultural dimensions discussed, educators can create more inclusive and effective learning environments that better support students' academic journeys.

5. Implications and Conclusion

The survey results demonstrate the substantial influence of the Erasmus teaching mobility program on the department's internationalization efforts. Participants, despite encountering challenges, reported high levels of engagement and satisfaction. To maximize the benefits of the program, it is essential to address both the pedagogical and policy dimensions that can enhance the experience and long-term outcomes of Erasmus mobility initiatives.

A key finding is the need for cultural responsiveness training. Participants frequently face challenges due to cultural differences in their mobility experiences. Institutions should respond by incorporating intercultural communication and cultural competence into faculty development programs. These trainings would provide educators with the necessary tools to effectively engage in international teaching contexts and build inclusive, culturally aware classrooms. Policy measures should support this by making such training a standard part of faculty development, ensuring that participants are adequately prepared for these experiences.

Another significant pedagogical implication is the desire to incorporate diverse perspectives into the curriculum, indicating that educators should actively include international case studies and collaborative projects. This not only enriches the educational experience but also aligns with institutional goals of fostering inclusivity and global awareness. From a policy standpoint, institutions must standardize the integration of global perspectives across all curricula, not as an optional feature but as a core element of the educational experience. This can be achieved through curriculum guidelines that require faculty to incorporate international content and viewpoints systematically, with regular assessments to ensure compliance.

Collaboration and networking also emerged as crucial components of the Erasmus experience. Pedagogically, institutions must promote environments where participants can engage in sustained professional interactions, such as faculty-led research projects or interdisciplinary collaborations. Policies should facilitate this by creating virtual platforms or research networks that enable ongoing dialogue and cooperation among participants, fostering a supportive academic community beyond the duration of the mobility.

While short-term learning objectives are important, there is also a need to focus on the long-term impact of Erasmus mobility programs. From a pedagogical perspective, this requires establishing tracking systems to assess how mobility experiences influence teaching methodologies, research productivity, and career development. On the policy side, institutions must implement long-term evaluation mechanisms to ensure that the Erasmus program's outcomes align with institutional goals and contribute to continuous professional growth. Data from these evaluations can be used to refine and improve internationalization strategies.

In addition, institutions must link Erasmus participation to career development. Pedagogically, the program should be positioned as a key component of faculty professional growth, contributing to teaching excellence and research innovation. Policies should formally recognize Erasmus participation in promotion criteria or professional development plans, encouraging wider engagement from faculty members and ensuring that mobility experiences contribute to career progression.

By responding to these pedagogical implications and implementing comprehensive policy recommendations, institutions can effectively position Erasmus teaching mobility as a transformative element of their global engagement strategy, reinforcing its role in advancing internationalization, collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity within higher education.

However, while the study provides valuable insights into the transformative potential of Erasmus teaching mobility programs, it is important to explicitly address several limitations that could influence the interpretation of the results. Firstly, although the study achieved a 100% response rate, the small sample size of 11 participants may limit the generalizability of the findings. The restricted sample size could hinder the representation of the full diversity of experiences and perspectives among participants in Erasmus teaching mobility programs. To enhance the robustness of future studies, a larger and more diverse sample should be included, ensuring a broader representation of participants from different cultural and institutional backgrounds.

Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data for assessing satisfaction and feedback introduces the potential for response bias, such as social desirability bias. Participants may provide responses that they believe are favorable or expected, which could influence the accuracy of the reported experiences. Additionally, retrospective recall bias may affect the accuracy of their responses, as students are reflecting on past experiences, which might be influenced by personal perceptions or external factors. Future research could mitigate this issue by incorporating more objective measures, such as third-party evaluations or pre- and post-program assessments, to triangulate data and reduce the impact of self-reporting bias.

Thirdly, while the study briefly refers to Hofstede's (1986) cultural dimensions, it does not delve deeply into the complexity of cultural adaptation and sensitivity within the Erasmus teaching mobility programs. Cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping participants' experiences and outcomes in international teaching exchanges. Future studies could address this gap by conducting a more in-depth cultural analysis, perhaps utilizing mixed methods approaches, such as qualitative interviews alongside quantitative cultural assessments, to provide richer insights into the role of cultural adaptation and sensitivity in these programs.

Fourthly, the study focuses primarily on short-term objectives and immediate satisfaction levels among participants. While these findings provide important insights into the participants' initial experiences, they may not capture the long-term impacts of engaging in Erasmus teaching mobility programs on participants' career trajectories, pedagogical practices, or institutional development. Longitudinal

studies that track participants over time would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the enduring effects of these mobility programs, including their influence on professional growth and institutional internationalization.

By addressing these limitations, future research could adopt more robust methodologies to better capture the multifaceted impacts of Erasmus teaching mobility programs on individuals, institutions, and the broader higher education landscape, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of their transformative potential.

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